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BY

J. STUART HOLDEN, M.A.

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AUTHOR OF

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To my friend

James D. Crosbie,

with much affection.

FOREWORD

THE aim of these Sermons is entirely practical. They have all been preached in the course of the regular ministry at St. Paul's, Portman Square, in which it is my constant endeavour to deal week by week with the problems and difficulties of the ordinary man in relation to the Christian life. Without any intended sequence of thought, their general intention is to help men toward that fulness of life in Christ which is indeed as a flood-tide in its power. All other considerations have been subordinated to this end in their preparation and delivery, and in yielding to some repeated requests for their publication. If they shall be the means of helping any to a realisation of Christ's manifold grace in its bearing upon their lives I shall be eternally grateful to Him.

J. S. H.

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LIFES FLOOD-TIDE

I

THE INTOLERANT CHRIST

"He that is not with Me is against Me."—MATT. xii. 30.

THERE is something bewildering in the endless variety of Christ's character. The many-sidedness and withal the perfect symmetry of His life has always puzzled men even while it persuaded them. At one time He is the Man of gentleness, calling the weary and heavy-laden with a voice which thrills with sympathy and is irresistible in its wooing winsomeness. At another time He is the Man of sternness, denouncing insincerity with a voice now vibrant with passion, and flashing the light of a pure indignation upon all that is unholy and untrue. At one time it is His

lowliness, and at another His loftiness which sets Him forth in compelling vividness as "not of this world." At one time the closeness of His intimacy with common men and their interests invests Him with a magnetic attraction to which all hearts respond ; while at another His remoteness and unapproachableness inspire with a sense of reverent awe those who venture nigh.

And yet despite all, or perhaps because of all the perplexing variations of His revealed nature there is a something about Christ which seems to harmonize these apparent contradictions into one unique perfection. In Nature the many-hued rays unite in forming the bright beam of light, and what at first seem mutually contradictory are discovered as being in reality mutually complementary. So is it in Christ. The conjunction of apparently irreconcilable qualities in a beauty which is the light and life of men, goes far to attest the reality alike of His humanity and His divinity. Without these mystifying anti-

theses which abound in Him it would be hard to recognize Him as fulfilling His own claims. The preciousness and fairness of a jewel is only discerned by means of its many facets; and new brilliance and beauty only break forth as the gem is held at changing angles to the light.

It is with the desire of new and enriching discovery in Christ that we think upon the quality of intolerance which, though often overlooked by His people, nevertheless, characterized in marked fashion all His life and work for men; and is of deep and real significance to us all. For He changes not with the fleeting years.

Now at first sight the use of such a word as intolerance to describe Christ is almost repugnant to us. It sounds harsh; for we are accustomed to think of Him as of One so full of love as to be without asperities of any kind. Of broader mind and more charitable judgment than any who preceded or who have succeeded Him, can it be that we find anything

akin to intolerance in Him? Is He not too large and generous to have aught of the smallness of mind by which we usually identify the intolerant man to-day? Is not the divine nature too ample to admit of what at any time seems petulant and impatient? For we do not usually commend intolerance as being the quality of the truly great. On the contrary, we rather pity the man who is so small as to be intolerant of all but his own views and his own order, and who intolerantly excludes and condemns those who are not in agreement with him. And in this we do well. For nothing is so unseemly and unlovely as an intolerant man, who is commonly but an ignorant one.

But herein lies the essential difference between the intolerance of Christ and of all others—most of all of His professed disciples. Their intolerance is the expression of imperfect and fragmentary knowledge. His is the intolerance of One Who knows! He knows the why and

wherefore of the mission on which He has been sent by the Father. He knows the subtlety and strength of the sin which He has come to combat for and in men. He knows the wide range of possibility in every life to which He makes appeal, the full value of the capacity and aptitude which He seeks to deliver from the grip of destructive forces. He knows the grieved love of the sadly-wronged God, and the yearning of the Father-heart over the alienated affection of the deceived child. And, knowing all this, He would be less than divine were He not intolerant of all that arrays itself against God's purpose of recovery and deliverance, of all that binds and blinds men to their true life, of all that impairs and incapacitates them, of all that deceives and defiles them, of all that outrages the love which is everlasting in its patience and faith.

Then, His intolerance is not only the expression of His knowledge but of His love. It were impossible to think of Him as the true lover of men, apart from

just this unaccommodating austerity, which at all times declares absolute truth in its tonic bitterness. There is an intolerance in moral and spiritual issues, which is the only possible voice by which love can declare itself, and by which truth can win recognition for itself. And this is the intolerance of the Son of God. The scientist is inspired to intolerance in his unrelenting fight with the deadly disease-germs, just because he knows the virulence of the foe, and wants to benefit mankind by its complete conquest. Were he more tolerant he would be less benevolent. The artist is intolerant of ugliness and discord by reason of the fine sensibilities of his nature. He feels with an exquisite pain anything which outrages the canons of beauty and taste. Hence his protests, often it is to be feared ineffectual despite their sincerity. But notwithstanding his failure to secure a popular verdict, he must lift up his voice and declare the faith that is in him; for intolerance is part of his nature, and is of the very essence

of his art. The statesman too (as distinguished from the mere politician) is intolerant of anything which threatens or imperils his country; and we applaud the rare self-sacrificing service by which his intolerance makes itself known. Indeed, less than intolerance, when the issue involved affects adversely the life of the nation, would be treachery. And just as their intolerance attests the reality and worth of these and many others who could similarly be cited, so the intolerance which is everywhere discernible in Christ goes far to proclaim His divinity.

It is seen, for instance, in the high claims which He makes for Himself. "I am *the* Bread of Life"; "I am *the* Light of the World"; "I am *the* Way, *the* Truth, and *the* Life." That He can make such claim without any loss of modesty or show of mere egotism, that He can so declare Himself without any toleration of possible rival, is expressive of an undisturbed consciousness of divinity—in short, that He has indeed come

from God to men, and that He is God's full and final word to them. His quiet and altogether seemly intolerance with regard to His own office and work, is the unfaltering Evangel, that

"God hath other words for other worlds;
But for this world the Word of God is Christ."

How intolerant, too, is He in the commands which He lays upon men. "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God"; and again, "If any man come unto Me and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple"; and again, "Follow thou Me." He would save men from self-love which is self-destruction; from absorption in the deteriorating lower things of life, into which it is so easy to fall, and from which it is so hard to rise; from devotion to even the best things of which the human heart is capable, but which, unrelated to the central governing affection for which we have been made, make for our undoing; and from the worship of idols which tend

to become ideals, bringing the whole of life under their sway. And only an intolerant demand for whole-hearted allegiance and discipleship could be an effective Gospel unto such a redemption. He cannot be Lord at all if He is not Lord of all.

The same intolerance marks His imposition of self-discipline upon His followers. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. If thine hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee." Sin is the enemy; and, in respect of it, any toleration is at once disloyal and disastrous. And conscience and memory unite in confirmation of this His intolerance, hailing it as being the only effective way of dealing with sin's defiling enslavements. Were Christ to be in any degree less intolerant in the matter of sin, or to impose a less harsh and rigorous discipline upon those who would follow Him, conscience would shrink from accepting Him. For there is that within every man in regard to his own sin which, at any

rate in his best moments (and never let us forget that it is then we are most truly ourselves), shrinks and recoils from anything like temporizing or excusing of the wilful transgression. Nothing but the drastic, the radical, the intolerant, can ever satisfy the clamant need of the human soul in its sin-created agony. It turns from any cheap and easy way of peace with an instinctive refusal which is self-protective. It is drawn to Christ by the intolerant conditions upon which alone His power of deliverance may be known.

But it is, perhaps, most conspicuously in His discriminating division of men that this spirit and quality is seen in Christ. He banishes all uncertainty and disposes of all ambiguity—and that for all time—in declaring that “he that is not with Me is against Me.” In moral issues mere neutrality is quite impossible; and it is of the very nature of love to make this indubitably clear. Nor can this issue be evaded. Men must take sides when

brought within the zone of Christ's compelling personality and mission. There is always "a division among the people because of Him." For while there is so much in Christ to quicken love and stimulate faith, there is always much to stagger the unwilling and unready. The intolerance which brooked no dissuasion from the pathway of redeeming sacrifice; which turned a deaf ear to affectionate entreaty, and with steadfast face set out on the pilgrimage of the Cross, nor rested until all was accomplished, now seeks the highest place in the hearts of men. For this is the intolerance of a hungering love. Obviously it is destructive of self-interest, of sinful affection, of unholy thought and action, of worldly compli-
ance, and of all that is frequently found in usurpation of the throne of God in the lives of men. The issue is thus always between self-will and the will of God. And it is self-determined. We either actively range ourselves with Christ in His attitude toward these things, or

passively declare ourselves against Him. We crown Him or crucify Him. And it is our spiritual sympathies which pronounce upon us. He does not judge us by our mental assent to the articles of a creed. As a matter of fact, He formulated no creed; for no creed could fully define Him, nor sufficiently express His intent and power. Nor does He judge us by our allegiance to a system of belief or worship. As a matter of fact, He imposed no system; for no system could contain or convey a grace boundless as the ocean and limitless as the universe. No! He simply says that the one who is not with Him in all the active sympathies of life, not in living agreement with His programme, nor in loyal co-operation with His power, is against Him.

Of course it would not be true to assume that He does not recognize the limitations of present apprehension of Him. At best we know but "in part." But we know! And to be untrue to our measure of knowledge, to be unwilling to follow

as far as we see the footprints before us, to withhold the allegiance which is the logical outcome of our present recognition of Him, is to write ourselves down as "against" Him. For He does not admit the existence of any *via media*.

How much does the present day need to be reminded of this divine intolerance? We are in danger of imagining that our often superficial interest in the external things of the kingdom of God is all that is needed of us; and of deluding ourselves that our shallow judgments are a sufficient justification for conduct which contradicts the Christian ethic. An easy familiarity with certain phases of the Gospel has bred in us a sort of contemptuous tolerance of its implications. We do not fear for ourselves, nor tremble at the approach of sin, as in earlier days. Indeed, we have successfully banished the idea of sin from our theology and our scheme of things. Formerly men thought themselves too bad to approach God. To-day they regard themselves as being too good

to need Him. Once He was omnipotent. Now He is merely negligible. Popular imagination, as far as it is exercised at all with regard to Him, conceives God as One Whose love is to be looked for in His kindly indulgence of human frailty, and Whose benign kindness and good-nature accepts any kind of homage. We are in deadly peril of drugging ourselves into the very sleep of death by drinking in, as though it were the Water of Life, a distorted idea of His graciousness. As though this was His only quality! We forget the jealousy of a love which said of old, "Thou shalt have none other gods but Me." And there is, perhaps, nothing so calculated to arouse and sting us into a true understanding of things as this word of Christ's intolerance, "He that is not with Me is against Me." As the sleeper in the snow is rudely awakened by his rescuer, whose violent methods, at first resented by the disturbed slumberer, afterwards evoke his gratitude, so does Christ force us to face the facts of our life and His,

And how searching is His test! What a striking answer to all merely artificial pose in regard to His claims is given in this word of His intolerance! It is the vogue amongst a certain class of people to-day to profess a non-committal attitude toward Christ, as though they were in some uncertainty as to His reality, and as though the scales of their moral judgment had not yet swung in His favour. They imagine themselves to be in a neutral position with not a little complacent superiority. Christ, however, intolerant of anything insincere and pretentious, plainly declares that not "with" Him, such ones are "against" Him. There is a pathetic folly in imagining ourselves to be judging Christ, when all the time He is actually judging us, and when our lives are faithfully recording the judgment.

A story is told of one of a party of visitors to a great continental gallery, who expressed himself in all ignorance as thinking but little of the priceless pictures on the walls. He freely criticized

them aloud ; thought they were vastly overrated ; that they were but ugly old things ; only made artificially valuable by mere sentiment, and the like. To all of which the guide quietly responded, "Sir, you perhaps do not know that it is not the pictures which are on their trial ; it is the visitors !" And so with men and Christ. Every day of our lives is really a judgment-day, which reveals the hidden man of the heart, and records his determining attitude toward the Son of Man.

What a surprise many of us would get did we but see something of the work of our own influence. For influence is one of life's unquestioned forces, always silently operative, and accomplishing results for good or evil far beyond our conception. We are always starting or strengthening in other lives impulses whose issues are eternal, for "no man liveth unto himself." Our personal relationship with Christ by no means ends with our own destiny ; and one of the startling

discoveries of eternity will be of the share we have had in forming or deforming other lives. Those with whom we are constantly coming into contact are in many cases taking their impressions of Christ from our reflection of Him, and adopting our attitude toward His Evangel as their own. Hence the force of Christ's contention that the man who is not avowedly "with" Him is "against" Him—and be it said, "against" Him to an undreamt-of degree. Let us not forget, on the other hand, that the one who is indeed "with" Him in the entire consecration of a life which His love has redeemed, shares a partnership of power which re-enforces every activity and multiplies every effort; so that his life becomes, beyond all imagining, useful and fruitful unto the greatest glory of God. "Against" Him, our every day but lays up eternal blame and shame. "With" Him, we ourselves are transformed into something of His likeness, receive something of His contagious passion, and ourselves

acquire redemptive values in the work of His kingdom. As He deals with such latent and actual possibilities, is it to be wondered at that we find in Christ this strain of intolerance? Is it not true to say that were He not intolerant He would not be divine? And does not His intolerance shed for us all a new and transfiguring light upon the methods by which He has ever sought to bring us to Himself? His unspeakable love is the interpretation of His mystifying providence, and the greatness of His purposes the justification of His intolerant Gospel.

Let us see to it that we meet His claim with a responsive intolerance which forbids the withholding of aught that He savingly demands of us. For this is the genius of "the life that is life indeed." And they that are "with Him are called and chosen and faithful."

II

THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD GOD

"I will go in the strength of the Lord God."—Ps. lxxi. 16.

THE opening of a new year cannot fail to be a time of solemn and heart-searching consideration. Behind is a measured portion of life. Before is an unmeasured sketch which may lengthen out into great distance, or may terminate with near abruptness. We look back upon an unalterable record, a pathway in too many cases strewn with the wrecks of unfulfilled purposes and broken ideals; and the retrospect fills us with gloom. For we have failed where we hoped to win; and have so forfeited our own confidence that we are prone to conclude that disappointment is

tr /

always inevitable, and that it is hardly worth while to make a new effort.

[One of the advantages, ~~however~~, which the artificial division of time into cycles ~~brings~~, is that of enabling us to regard the commencement of each year as a time of new beginnings. The stimulus of a fresh start is made available even to the most disheartened. As from a mountain-peak we are enabled to look out into a future illumined with new-born hope, and to set out afresh with quickened footsteps on our journey toward the sun-rising. Happy is the man whose heart re-echoes the Psalmist's word, and whose reasoned resolve is to go forth—as indeed he must—"in the strength of the Lord God"—as indeed he may. For this is the secret of gaining strength sufficient to make the future unlike the past, and to realize every hope of progress. Along the divinely-ordered pathway is always to be found the divinely-promised power. It is such a certainty as this which makes it possible for us to start afresh,

STRENGTH OF THE LORD GOD 21

Stand out in the sunlight of Promise, forgetting
Whatever the past held of sorrow or wrong.
We waste half our strength in a useless regretting;
We sit by old tombs in the dark far too long.

Have you missed in your aim? Well, the mark
is still shining ^b

Did you faint in the race? Well, take breath
for the next ^b

Did the clouds drive you back? Well, see yonder
their lining ^b

Were you tempted and fell? Let it serve for a
text.

As each day hurries by let it join the procession
Of skeleton shapes that march down to the past;
While you take your place in the line of pro-
gression,

With your feet on the Path, and your face to the
blast.

[Now to every man life is ordinarily and
necessarily a going forth. The future is
always becoming the present, as the present
is always becoming the past. Every day
sees another stretch of road traversed; and
every year unerringly records another
length of life's thread paid out. We have
to go out daily to a practically unknown
journeying. And nothing is more impor-
tant than that its general direction should

be already determined by a consecration which comprehends the unknown alike with the known.]

[The great danger into which many lives fall is that of a haphazard carelessness both as to the going and the goal. They are content to merely drift on in obedience to every wind and current without having any definite idea as to direction. A good-natured hope that somehow or other all will be well in the end ; and an easy tolerance of everything that is not obviously wrong seems to constitute their entire moral equipment for the serious duty of living. And it is not too much to say that nothing of real worth in any realm ever comes to such casual lives. A voyage without a chart is apt to end in a wreck. ~~That which is left to chance usually becomes chaos.~~ A planless life is certain to be a powerless one. For life is a bigger and more serious thing than we are usually inclined to regard it ; and one of the tragedies of the present day is that of finding and contenting ourselves with a

too easy^{an} interpretation of its meaning, its mystery, and its majesty.]

¶ Now the first clear duty of each of us is an honest determination of life's direction, ~~a duty which the dawning of another year but serves to emphasize.~~ Many divergent paths seem to meet at our feet; and each of them has some sort of attractiveness, and makes some sort of appeal to us. But only he who squarely looks life in the face, and resolutely sets himself to reach the highest and best is worthy of its treasure and trust. He alone who takes God's direction, ~~the Heavenward~~ and hence the ~~holy~~ pathway, the way of loyalty and hence often the way of loneliness, can hope to find his own largest and fullest being. Of course, such a determination must be made not in a burst of blinding emotion; but with full certainty of going on into new and growing experience of ~~wearying~~ conflict with opposing forces, of ~~humbling~~ self-discovery, of ~~painful and~~ refining discipline, and of almost overwhelming opportunity and necessity of losing self in

service. For to go in the way of the Lord means all this. But it means more also: For he who makes such determination, ~~and setting the Lord~~ ^{always} before him, goes courageously onward, goes on into ever new amazement at His goodness and patience, and ever new satisfaction at the sufficiency of His assistance. "I will go in the strength of the Lord" is the vow which answers before it comes every tempting suggestion to turn to the right hand or the left. For it expresses the determining consecration of the heart, which being pure, has seen God; and in His light has also seen light.

It takes some of us a long time to learn the limitations of self-help. We set out full of confidence and buoyancy, with a slightly contemptuous opinion of the foe, and with no disposition to learn anything from the failures of others. With a jaunty certainty of superiority and success, we confidently go forward—and fail. And this we do again and again, until the fact of our strengthlessness penetrates through

^{Confidence}
 the resisting self-conceit, and we at length
 acknowledge our utter insufficiency.
 Then, indeed, is the hour of danger, for
 we are then near the great discovery of
 available omnipotence ; and all the forces
 of the foe are in league to deter and drive
 us back. For the one who has learned in
 his unspeakable need to link himself on to
 the power of God, menaces the kingdom
 of darkness and must at all costs be
 opposed. This is the atmosphere in
 which true and worthy New Year resolves
 must be made ; and this is the reason
 of their difficulty. Let no one imagine
 that it is ^{so} an easy thing to yield up the
 fancied strength which has proved so
 traitorous, and to resist every opposing
 influence to self-surrender. It is one of
 the great struggles of the soul. But its
 pain is as the birth-pang of a new life.
 "I will go in the strength of the Lord
 God " is the word of a victory which makes
 all other conquests possible. It can only
 come from a man of conquered spirit, such
 an one as in whose weakness that strength

may be perfected. It expresses, too, a view of life which is worthy and inspiring. It says, not that life is small and sorrowful, and that therefore God is needed to strengthen and sweeten it—a view which far too generally obtains. But declares rather that life is large and great and powerful, and that therefore God is needed for its sure guidance and reinforcement. Its impulses are so great that they need control. Its ideals are so exalted that every best endeavour needs supplementing strength ere they can be realized. Its potentialities are so vast and bewildering that unaided aim is entirely inadequate, ~~and only makes irreparable loss certain.~~ Its consequences of good and evil are so immeasurable that protective assistance is absolutely necessary if we are to acquire the treasure and avoid the Nemesis. Yes ! life is the largest word in any language ; and no one can fathom its meanings by undertaking its adventure apart from the strength of the Lord. Of course if our destiny were lower our difficulties would

be less. Mere human power is adequate enough if the goal aimed at is low enough—if it is merely social, commercial, intellectual. But if it be divine, as it is; if the objective be the acquisition of eternal character which is capacity for eternal service; then we must have an unbroken communication of the strength of the Lord God. He only can enable us to unlock life's faculties, to arouse its half-sleeping moral forces, to lay hold of its opportunities, and to fulfil its obligations.]

For it is only the strength of the Lord God that can repair the ravage of sin in any life. And here we touch the very core of the difficulty of worthy living. The strengthlessness of desire and will and effort of which we are made conscious continually, is nothing more than the product of sin, either of commission or omission, or both. And it takes God Himself to repair the debilitated capacity and re-create the impaired power which attest the reign of sin in the domain of the soul. It is only the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus

which can set us free from the law of sin and death. And this is the pledge of the Atonement. Apart from its regenerating power, its cleansing and conquest, all talk of a new life is utterly futile. The glory of the Evangel is that for all time God has expressed His saving strength in terms unmistakably clear. For in the sacrificial gift of His Son He has placed Himself in His essential power at the disposal of faith and love. Christ is the strength of God, and He saves to the uttermost (and that from the uttermost) all who come unto God by Him. How frequently do we hear the great Sacrifice proclaimed as though its main work were the procuring and declaring of pardon. Whereas this is but its initial experience to any believing soul ; and is to be rightly understood as being but the entrance upon a renewed and an abundant life. Such inadequate conception almost invariably leads to a nerveless and languid spiritual life whose chief solicitude is selfward, and whose motto seems to be—"Receive!

receive! receive!" In reality, however, true Christian life is not ~~an ease but an encounter~~. *an easy receiving*
 Its main expression is not a song, but a *A sentence*
 strife. Its true attitude is not that of resting, but resisting. Its worthiest fruit is not an ecstasy but an energy which makes for righteousness, and labours toward the extension of the Kingdom of Christ in the world. And who is sufficient for all this apart from the imparted strength of God in Christ? And who need be weak and cast down if He is so presently available?

Perhaps the hardest task for any man is the recovery of lost inspirations and enthusiasms. There is something entirely elusive about them which defies all effort at recapture; and but few of us ever succeed in regaining what has somehow been lost by negligence or wilfulness. Memory is apt to mock at the result of every struggle by making vivid the experiences of former days, and compelling comparison. But memory must not be allowed to become despotic; for the past is not

the highest type of life for any one. The Gospel is always beckoning us on to higher heights than have been scaled, and to completer victories than have ever been experienced. It replaces the old and now irrecoverable inspirations by newer and stronger creations. ~~It declares that to the~~ man who honestly sets out upon the pathway of discipleship there is an assured correspondence between precept and power. It proclaims that a full enduement ~~is attached to every ordered engagement.~~ It asserts the vital connection between determination and dynamic. To the obedient believer support is proportioned to strain; and as is his day so shall be his strength. All of which means that there is no promise of power to the morally indolent; but that to the one who honestly sets himself to obey Christ there is no lack. And this is the new and enduring inspiration which possesses and governs the soul of the one who in these words declares his decision.

It is an accepted fact of Nature that in

every cubic foot of air there is locked away one thousand foot-tons of power. Science is thereby challenged with the task of unlocking this store, and of leading it forth for the service of the world in the form of light, heat, and energy. And to this all modern scientific discovery and invention tends—the making actual of the potential, by observance of the increasingly apprehended laws which govern air-pressure and the like. Similarly, every divine precept, every necessary duty, every obvious obligation, and every unavoidable conflict is charged with divine power. The problem of the Christian life is to unlock and use it unto holiness and victory. And the secret is contained in the simple declaration which we cannot too often repeat, “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.”

Are you burdened with a sense of the failure which is behind? Do you shrink from the difficulty which looms up in the near future? Does your heart quail at the mere prospect of having

to do the very thing you have long dreaded? Do the oppositions of the world and the devil, and the instabilities of your own heart terrify you? Is the prospect of possible service amid unknown and even dangerous surroundings making you hesitate in the matter of whole-hearted surrender to the Lord? Are the perplexing problems of home and business life weighing heavily and gloomily upon you? Then remember that to go forth in His strength, calmly relying upon His faithfulness to fulfil His word, is to put Him to a test which He can well sustain and will never repudiate. In all these things you will be more than conqueror through Him. Your pathway shall blaze with the light of His glory. For to go in the strength is to go also into the sunshine of the Lord God.

[How fruitful of illustration of this close connection between determination and dynamic is an even casual glance at the Bible records.] Abraham went out into

of the great men and women in the Bible.

the unknown at the call of God, and found himself surrounded and supported by His power unto a life of accomplishment and endurance beyond his dreams. Elijah, a lonely man with no resource but the God before Whom he stood, went in His strength to confront a wicked king, and to turn a recalcitrant nation back to Jehovah. Daniel, in the strength of the Lord God, cheerfully looked death in the face rather than impugn His good name by cowardly disobedience.

And these are but typical of the unnumbered host whose lives attest the safety and certainty of trust and obedience—a host whose leader is the Lord Christ Himself. For right through His earthly life, when the dawning consciousness of His mission overtook Him, when the fires of hatred blazed around Him, when the voice of human affection dissuaded Him, when the loneliness of unrequited love discouraged Him, when the fleeting splendours of the world tempted Him, when the Cross loomed out of the gathering darkness and

frowned upon Him, He did, in effect, say, with the calm courage of One Who knew all its implicate, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God." And His going forth has compassed the world's salvation.

Now for each one of us the Gospel of His grace is for all time comprehended in this—"Follow thou Me."

Only let us remember, as we make or renew our determination, that it is the *Lord* God whose strength is our sufficiency. His enthronement conditions our endowment. To yield less than the whole life to Him is to fail with absolute certainty of His power unto salvation. The Holy Ghost is never given where Jesus is not glorified. But His power is never withdrawn where Jesus is obeyed. Make Him King, and He will make you conqueror, right on unto the end.

III

THE PERIL OF THE SECOND BEST

"He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls."—PSA. cvi. 15.

WE frequently make the mistake of limiting the call of the Gospel to the initial alternatives which it presents. It sets before us Christ and His kingdom as against the world and its attractions; and urges upon us the necessity of choice. ~~Indeed, all its pressure is directed toward making clear the fact that choice is unavoidable; and all its influence is exerted toward enabling us to choose worthily, courageously, and savingly.~~

run on But when the will, conscience-prompted and stirred into action by the high emotion of the heart, has made the eternal choice, and has opened up life to the reign and

rule of the Saviour, only the first step in the Christian life has been taken. There still ranges before us all the pilgrim-pathway along which we must patiently plod in the comradeship of our Lord. And it is just along that pathway that there lurks the peril of the second best. For life is one long series of choices to those who are not the less but the more reasonable and responsible beings for having united themselves to Christ. It is inevitable that choices must be daily made by them between the supreme and the secondary, between the lofty and the low, between self-pleasing and God-pleasing. And these choices are of tremendous importance, for their result is to start or to strengthen springs of moral issue both in our own lives and in the lives of others.] We need, therefore, to be aware of the ever-present necessity of watchfulness and wariness, if we would avoid that which has brought shipwreck to many a nobly-begun life. The foe is not only strong, but amazingly subtle and specious.

Now the greatest and commonest danger

is not that of turning aside from the pathway of life to roam in the fields of sin. There are few who are condemned in such apostacy as the choice of the manifestly bad. But to us all the temptation comes with startling frequency to choose the better instead of the best ; to choose things which may be morally worthy considered by themselves ; things which may have a great deal to commend them, but which are not the will of God for us.

And yet so far as the practical effect in our lives is concerned we might almost as well choose the openly evil. For by committing ourselves to any course than that of absolute fidelity to the highest, we put ourselves hopelessly out of touch with God, Who often gives us our desire but sends leanness also into our souls. And that deterioration of life which ensues, and which eventually disables us from even recognizing anything higher than that which we have gone in for, is the awful Nemesis of the choice of a second best.

This is forcefully illustrated in the case of

Israel, to whom these words ~~originally~~ refer. God's purpose for the Israelites was that they should have no earthly sovereign. He Himself purposed to be their Lord and King. The uniqueness of a theocracy was designed as part of His educative process of the nations. Israel was to be the world's object-lesson. But Israel rebelled. They said to the prophet of God, "Make us a king. We want to be like, and not unlike the other nations. We want a monarchy with all its trappings and splendours. We want a king who will lead us to battle and give us that place among the nations from which a theocratic government excludes us." All of which is of course eloquent of the fact that they had failed in faith, and had lost any national love for God which their unique history of His goodness to them had ever inspired. God, however, did not leave them to their own devices nor cast them off. He said in effect—"Very well. Make them a king. They are not choosing the best as I have offered it to them ; but I will let them have their self-chosen second best. It is the

only way of teaching them their folly and of bringing them ultimately to know themselves—and Me.” And the whole of that nation’s subsequent history shows the peril of the second best. ~~They were, for instance,~~ so situated geographically that God alone could be sufficient for their preservation. On the north was the great kingdom of Syria ; and on the south was Egypt. Sooner or later it was inevitable that these two, ambitious of world-power, should come into conflict ; and Israel was the buffer-state which must bear the brunt of the battle. Whenever it should be waged, the war must be carried out for the most part on Israel’s territory. Therefore it was more important to Israel than to any other nation under the sun that she should be God-protected. But she chose otherwise, and with ~~what result ? God’s purpose was frustrated.~~ Disastrous war with all its attendant horrors came upon her. The nation, instead of becoming the world’s teacher, became the world’s disciple. The land was distracted with internal dissensions and unrest. Fitful

prosperity attended the flickering flame of worship. Until eventually, we come upon the sad story of the nation's captivity. And although a restoration was made later, and a renewed opportunity afforded her, Israel is to-day a scattered nation over all the face of the earth—an abiding testimony to the peril of choosing the second best.]

And not only is this set forth in national but in personal life also. Take, for instance, the case of Solomon, whose choice of wisdom when the opportunity of asking what he would was afforded him is often acclaimed as being an example of the highest and worthiest choosing. But was it so? He chose wisdom that he might become a great ruler, and make his kingdom a great power. He became thereby strong, rich, and successful—and he became a cast-away! Had he chosen God's best, he would have asked for holiness of heart, purity of mind, nobility of purpose, and constancy of devotion. Then the sad, awful story of the end of Solomon's reign had never been written.] This is the peril which is

round about us all, the peril of the second best. For God certainly allows such to those who will not have His best. He does not leave us when we fail in this matter of making the choices by which life's actions and directions are largely governed. Indeed it is on this account that the second best leads often to sore discipline and to the smart and sting of unexpected and unwelcome experiences. The second best which God allows us in our folly and wilfulness to choose, is often the kindest way He can take of showing us our own hearts and of redeeming us from their waywardness. Leanness of soul is always the consequence of self-will. But it sometimes also expresses the love of an interested God. |

Now if these illustrations of a principle of action have any value at all for us, it surely is in their emphasis on the necessity of adopting and maintaining an attitude of entire consecration toward Christ, which declares itself in unflinching choice of the highest in every moral and spiritual crisis. |

It is a commonplace to say that our

choices attest our character, and that the things to which a man's mind involuntarily turns shows what kind of man he is. It is true to add that these same choices make the character they proclaim ; and at the same time silently and inexorably determine destiny. The seriousness and solemnity of life is that every day we live we are tested as to the vital foundations and inspirations of life. For to every one of us, and almost daily, comes the temptation to adopt lower and unworthier standards than those of Christ's ethic. We are tempted to take courses in which material gain and advantage are uppermost. We are tempted to order life so as to secure present advantage. We are tempted to diminish life's dimensions by making ease, comfort, and prosperity its chief end. In short, we are tempted to take the way of the world rather than the way of Christ] to go with the multitude and not with the Master ; to refuse God's will in favour of some second best. I am constantly meeting people who ask, " May I do this or that thing and still be a Christian ?

Is it possible for me to harmonize my Christian profession with this or that pursuit? May I not make the best of both worlds?" And their peril is that in their endeavour to do so, they are making choice of a second best which will certainly recoil upon them in undreamt-of evil. Not that God leaves them; for He never does that. But He cannot do otherwise than alter the expression of His solitudes in allowing the thing chosen to correct their self-will, and in using the leanness which comes into their souls to lead them back to the place of whole-hearted obedience to Himself.

How often, too, is this perilous choice of a second best seen in the refusal of men to openly confess Christ, even though they truly trust Him in their hearts. They say, "I will certainly be His disciple and worship Him as my Lord. But I don't intend that there should be anything conspicuous or extravagant about my witness to Him." And in their refusal of that close identification with Christ to which the Gospel pledges His followers, and which is really

of moral value to His cause in the world, they are satisfying themselves with a perilous second best. They are the people who have a mere kindly sympathy with the enterprises of His kingdom, but whose hearts are really in the things of the world ; who, when confronted with the call to strenuous service which comes to every professed follower of the Saviour, decline its glories for the sake of the ease and pleasure which would need to be sacrificed. Amongst them are those young people who are refusing the call to work in the Regions Beyond in favour of the brighter attractions and inducements of home, and who justify their choice by all kinds of specious reasoning. When in reality they have just fallen into the deadly peril of the second best.

It is not too much to say that all such are laying up for themselves an experience of leanness, dissatisfaction, and disillusion which, when seen in other lives, is one of the most terrible warnings of life. For the choice of the second best, involving

as it does the outrage of conscience and the silencing of our best instincts, always means also the forfeiture of the closest fellowship with God, and the loss of that divine partnership of power in which God reinforces and uses men to His glory. How many men ~~has one known who,~~ when confronted with the stern duty of making a determining choice, have unconsciously bartered all that makes life worth while by giving their allegiance and devotion to a specious second best. They become prosperous, but their souls are almost petrified. ~~They gain the world, but lose all true worth.~~ They acquire importance, but lose influence. ~~Oh, how lean do~~ their souls become! ~~How little of true joy, how little of divine glory, and how little of real power do their lives manifest.~~ How vividly ~~do~~ they illustrate the peril of the second best, and how warningly. Just an unwillingness to pay the price of God's best, just a subtle reasoning that because the choice is not of the unholy and the unclean it is therefore justified, just

a successful controversy with conscience and a denial of its imperious claims, and the perilous reversion is entered upon. When two lines are in exact parallel they may be produced to infinity without increasing by a hair's breadth the distance between them. Let one of them, however, deflect in the slightest degree and then the further they are produced the greater becomes the distance between them. There is power in the smallest difference of direction to separate them by a whole universe of distance. And so is it in the all-important matter of choice. To turn from the highest for aught else, however slight the difference between them, is to make ultimately certain a gulf of separation between the soul and God which can only be bridged by divine grace and the bitter penitence of a renewed life.

It may be, and most often is, a sharp test and challenge of faith to apprehend what is God's best; for its recognition brings the immediate responsibility of response. Just as it was a searching test of Israel's faith

~~to be called to stand alone among the~~ nations, to be God-governed, God-guided, and God-possessed, so this necessity of declining a mere second best is certainly a ~~test to us~~. Always to follow the guiding light, always to submit every judgment to the will of God, always to take the pathway of His glory amid all the intersecting and perplexing paths that open before us, is the most severe test which life holds. But happy indeed is the man whose courage does not falter, whose ideals are not dethroned, whose heart is not traitorous to conscience and to God in the hour of his trial.

Now it follows upon the simple acceptance of the fact of God's interested care and personal providence, that since His best (which is of course just another name for His will) is the design of His love, all our capabilities are fitted for just that thing and for no other. ~~I mean that He originally~~ made us with a view to receiving His own greatest glory in our lives; and endued us with just those aptitudes which make that ~~possible~~. When He made us of the peculiar

personal character which each one bears, and set us in the mould of circumstances which have all along influenced our development, it was with the object of fitting us for the fulfilment of His best plan for us. And we mar by misuse, and forfeit by disuse, every endowment diverted from its original purpose. ~~To illustrate from the~~ lower sphere of mere physical things :—I know a man whom God manifestly made for an open-air life, for hard work. He has a body which by inherited need demands contact with the soil and strenuous manual toil. By a strange reversal of the wheel of fortune, and (as those who care for him most affirm) a stranger misreading of its divine message and meaning, it became possible for him to live a life of ease, and to have all his needs supplied without any sort of exertion on his part. The consequence is that the man once strong and vigorous has become a nervous hypochondriac, a kind of physical derelict. God meant him for one thing and he chose another in the ~~hour of his supreme test ; with the conse-~~

quence that his powers have deteriorated and his capabilities have almost atrophied. There is no tragedy which is to be so carefully avoided as that of living for lower things than God intended us for. ~~Such a life, if it finally enters Heaven at all, can only do so crippled, dwarfed, and stunted.~~ For all of our present life and training is but preparation for eternal service. What we lose now by our own choice we shall never regain by any arbitrary act of divine compensation. The bare possibility of eternal restriction of usefulness is the strongest warning of all against the peril of the second best.

A nearer consideration, too, is the fact which common observation attests, that the choice of the second best always brings impoverishment of present influence, ~~and entirely lowers the dimensions of life.~~ For if a man would wield highest influence he must live for the highest things. One knows of professedly Christian parents whose choice of the second best is witnessed in the unsatisfactory lives of their children. In-

stead of seeking first the kingdom of God, their home-life in its outlook and ordering has been largely influenced by the world, by the conventions of society and not by the convictions of the heart. And their children have taken their measure of God from the distorted reflection of Him which the parents have presented. The unavailing remorse which invariably follows is tragic indeed; and the unanswered cry for an opportunity to reverse the unworthy choice is an agony beyond words. The man who wakes up to the folly of his choice seldom finds a place of repentance, though he seeks it carefully and with tears. Such is the inexorable law of life.

But over against all these warning things is the ever-present inspiration of our Lord's own life—the strongest appeal to our hearts to choose the highest. For as we read the record of the days of His flesh, we see Him as the One Who always consistently chose God's best. "I came not to do Mine own will"—~~that is the second best~~—"but the will of Him that sent Me"—~~that is the~~

best ! " I came not to be ministered unto "
~~—the second best—" but to minister —the~~
~~best ! " I came not to call the righteous "~~
 —merely the second best, for they would
 all respond—" but I came to call sinners "
 the best ! " I came not to send peace on
 earth "—the second best—" but I came to
 send the sword of conflict and conquest "
 the best !

And again at the end of His life, when
 the cup was heavy and bitter and full, we
 hear Him in the garden still true to the
 governing purpose of His redeeming life—
 " Nevertheless, not as I will "~~—the second~~
~~best—" but as Thou wilt."~~ And choosing
 God's best, He drank the cup to the last
 dregs. And now for us all, God's best is
 expressed in Christ's call, " Follow thou
 Me." It all comes to this, that consistently,
 loyally, courageously to follow Him is to
 choose the highest in all life's alternatives.

God has His best things for the few
 Who dare to stand the test ;
 God has His second choice for those
 Who will not have the best.

It is not always open sin
That risks the promised rest ;
The *better* sometimes is the foe
That keeps us from the best.

There's scarcely one but vaguely wants
In some way to be blessed ;
'Tis not a blessing, Lord, I seek,
I want Thy very best.

I want in this short life of mine,
As much as may be pressed
Of service true for God and man ;
Help me to have Thy best.

~~I want amid the victor throng
To have my name confessed,
And hear my Saviour say at last,
"Well done ! you took the best."~~

Give me, my Lord, Thy highest choice,
Though others take the rest.
Their good things have no charm for me,
Since I have found Thy best."

For this is the choice which results in
abundant grace and abounding glory !

IV

THE BLESSING OF UNREALIZED AIMS

“ The Lord said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build a house for My Name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart ; notwithstanding thou shalt not build the house.”—2 CHRON. vi. 8, 9.

THERE is hardly a perplexity of the Christian life so mysterious and mystifying as that of our frustrated ambitions. Few there are of Christ's disciples whose original spiritual impulses have been allowed to come to full fruition ; whose every plan for the glory of God and for the blessing of the world has materialized. In no life does achievement keep pace with aspiration ; and to many, indeed, disappointment seems constantly to follow hard on the heels of desire. Most of us, at some time or other, plan to build a temple. We have been called unto holi-

ness, and in response we want our lives to become more constantly and obviously the temples of God's indwelling. We have been called unto service, and we want to erect in life the high-altar of sacrifice, and to engage in the sacred ministry of the Lord. But somehow our reach seems always greater than our grasp, and our best plans miscarry. Every God-given ideal is far higher than our present power of realization ; and on this account discouraging disappointment is prone to settle upon our hearts. For we are apt to forget that all divinely-inspired ideals require eternity for their final expansion and real fulfilment. In this respect our very disappointments testify to our immortality ; and are stored with blessing and enlightenment could we but interpret them aright.

The story of David's frustrated desire with regard to the building of God's house is one of many Bible incidents which are written for our learning in this very matter. For David is the forerunner of a long race of disappointed men, disap-

pointed in the most sensitive part of their being—the realm of their secret spiritual purposes. The details of this story are commonly familiar. He had been set upon the throne and wonderfully prospered by God. Out of his gratitude there was born the desire to erect a temple for God's earthly habitation in Israel. He made this purpose known to the prophet of God, who immediately accepted it, and for the moment furthered him in it. In the night, however, God spoke to His servant Nathan; so that on the next morning, with the humility of a true prophet, he returned to the king and said in effect that he had made a mistake, and that God did not intend that David should build His house. The motive and purpose were accepted, but the actual service was prohibited. Along with the discouraging message, however, came the uplifting words, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." And God's "Well done" is a solace and an encouragement to the man who had set his heart

upon such a high task ; and encourages him to turn to the ordinary and more commonplace duties of his office without resentment, in the inspiration of the Divine favour.

Now the disappointment of such an experience often leads men to discard their ideals as being mistaken and impossible. And this is the cause of much deterioration of life. For life's quality is always determined by the height of its aims. If a man will not do what he can because he cannot do what he would, he soon becomes the prey of destructive forces which rob and ruin him. When, not realizing the power to translate all our desires into living deeds, we discard them, we are in great danger of giving ourselves to lower and unworthier purposes. This is the ruinous reaction of disheartenment ; the recoil from disappointments wrongly conceived and construed. As a matter of fact all our disappointments, whether caused by self's failure or by divine frustration, should give us a fresh hold upon God, Who has

in a wonderful and mysterious way begun within us a work which He will not leave until He has perfected it in the day of Jesus Christ. Our unrealized aims are all parts of His processes. If we can but see them in the transfiguring light of His will, that is of His love and wisdom, we shall be saved from bitterness and back-sliding into heartease and holiness.

Now since God is independent of any man's work, it is not difficult to conclude that with Him honest intention counts for actual accomplishment. It is so very like God to say, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart," that the genuineness of the story is borne on its face, and this deduction made inevitable. Such a conclusion is of course open to a good deal of misconception. I can imagine, for instance, someone saying, "If this is so, then it does not matter how I live or what I do, whether I acquire character and accomplish service or not, so long as I intend to do it." Let us make no mistake so stupid or foolish. Such a word

as this is only addressed to the man of strenuous endeavour. Its significance is only to the one who brings all the possessions and powers of his life to the task of building the temple. Utter sincerity of purpose is both a postulate and an axiom in the things of the soul. But of such men, when there come into their lives unanswerable prohibitions of service, inexplicable restrictions of opportunity, and unalterable decrees of circumstance, it is perfectly safe to say that God counts some failures as magnificent successes. With such men, souls earnestly sought in the name and for the sake of Jesus are regarded as souls won. Service honestly attempted, though never fully accomplished, ranks as the perfected offering. For grace enters into our rewards, just as it enters into our redemption.

In such lives perhaps the greatest value of unrealized aims is to be seen in their purifying influences. There is nothing which has such sanctifying power in a man as a noble purpose, born in the hour

of supreme consecration to Christ, which keeps his life in one direction, which detains him from turning to the right hand or the left, and which lifts him in thought and aim above the things that do not count. There is a world of truth in the adage that "'tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." It is better to have had a temple-building intention in the heart, even though none of its stones are ever placed one upon another, than never to have had any such ennobling purpose with all its protective force making for righteousness.

But with all this, there remains in the heart of the one whose design is frustrated the unanswered "Why?" Why is it that God should as it were interfere with the carrying out of those purposes of which He is indeed the Author in our lives? Why should our progress toward the ideal of attainment and accomplishment be seemingly arrested? Why should abilities be suddenly changed into disabilities, and opportunities into prohibitions?

For instance—there is a young man who in his heart has long yearned to enter the Christian ministry. He has by dint of almost pathetic self-denial saved the small amount of money which will support him during the necessary preparation, and all seems to point to the near completion of his temple-ideal. Suddenly God interferes, and disappointment overtakes him. Bereavement lays a heavy burden upon him; and he must needs turn his back on the college and the pulpit, and earn money to keep his mother and educate his sister. To that young man in his magnificent heroism God says, as he takes up his task, "Thou didst well in that it was in thine heart." I believe that God counts that man a far more successful minister than many whose similar desire has not been similarly frustrated. Or again, there comes to the heart of some young girl the purpose to devote her life to foreign missionary service. Everything seems at first to corroborate the divine guidance in this direction and to

work together toward enabling her to build her temple. Then comes a dark hour of surprise and the shock of disappointment; and all her plans are broken never to be re-made. Health has gone, or a new responsibility of caring for a stricken father is laid upon her, or some other insuperable barrier to her going forth presents itself; and for a while the light seems to have faded from the heavens. But to her God is saying in reality, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." Some day she will know that her thwarted purpose has meant a far larger increase of glory to His name than its fulfilment could ever have brought. Or again, there is a man whose purpose was to make a large and worthy financial contribution to the work of the Lord. He seemed to be on the very threshold of a commercial prosperity for which he had long worked. The desire of his heart to substantially help forward the cause of Christ seemed to be almost possible. Then came the awful crash of his fortunes through the

failure of others ; and so far from being able to carry out what he had prayerfully purposed, he now finds it difficult even to make a living. But God says to that man, " I count your honest determination as an actual donation, and measure the value of your service according to the love of your heart. Thou didst well."

The scientists have long since been agreed upon the law of the conservation of energy ; which, speaking generally, is that no applied force in the world of matter is ever lost. Its form may be altered, its point of application may be entirely changed, it may not be discoverable by ordinary tests ; but as a matter of fact no force is ever lost. I am certain that in moral and spiritual things this is wonderfully true. No real force of divinely-inspired purpose is ever lost. Though that young man is in the office and not in the pulpit ; though that young girl is in the sick-room and not in the mission-field ; though that business man is poor and no longer able to plan large gifts for the work of God ; I

nevertheless believe that the force of that original impulse, far from being lost, is contributing in unthought-of measure to the sum total of God's glory in those lives, in the world, and in the Church. For these divine prohibitions are always related in some way to the development of personal character, and are always intended to secure further fruition in these our lives. God teaches us by such things as He could not do apart from them. And their great lesson is this, that He wants *us* rather than our work ; that He is depending upon the reproduction of the Christ-character in our lives rather than upon our busy activities, poor at their best. For, after all, the very best we can ever do, or the largest gifts we can ever make in the interests of His Kingdom, God can without any embarrassment dispense with. But in the mystery of His grace He cannot dispense with the development of His own character in us. For this is His corroborating witness to the world which knows Him not,

The frustration of the things on which we have set our hearts makes us better men and women, when we realize the value He puts upon our intention. And this is so even when we know that there is a reason in our own record for God's denial of our wish. It was so with David. This refusal of the privilege of building the temple could not but stimulate his memory and quicken him to righteousness. For God did not leave him in any uncertainty as to the reason for it, "Thou hast been a man of blood!" Nor could David forget that much of that blood-shedding had been unnecessary and unjustified, as the blood of Uriah the Hittite, which had been shed in positive lust and murder. And David would go softly all his days after God so put His restraining hand upon his cherished project. Nor could he fail to be the better man for having his memory thus brought into alliance with God for his own sanctification; and for having to feel the daily sting of remorse concerning that in which his life had been unworthy. The

very fact that there are ministries from which we are excluded by God for like reasons, when such is the case, is a constant discipline. It is a reminder of the ever-present need of the Blood-washing. It ensures the continuance of humility and dependence upon the grace which alone forgives.

"I asked of God that He should give success
To the high task I sought for Him to do ;
I asked that every hindrance might grow less
And that my hours of weakness might be few ;
I asked that far and lofty heights be scaled ;—
And now I humbly thank Him that I failed.

"For with the pain and sorrow came to me
A dower of tenderness in act and thought ;
And with the failure came a sympathy,
An insight which success had never brought.
Father, I had been foolish and unblest
If Thou hadst granted me my blind request."

But there yet remains a value in our unrealized aims beyond these, the value to others. David's desire kindled Solomon's enthusiasm ; and Solomon's kindled enthusiasm resulted in the finished Temple. What a wealth of significance does this fact reveal in the Divine en-

couragement, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." And what a joy to us to know that our frustrated service may, as our hearts are kept tender and yielded to God, be the means of influencing others to do what we could never do ! For the influence of any God-ordered life is a permanent quantity. It is ever laying foundations and providing materials for the work of others, just as in the case of David and Solomon. How forcefully is this illustrated in the world of Christian service ! Think of Henry Martyn, who went out to India after his brilliant university course, with the burning desire to use all his remarkable endowments in the evangelization of that land ; but whose purpose seemed to be cut off before he had almost begun to build the temple he had planned. Yet his life has been the inspiration of literally hundreds of young men who have gone forth to India since his day ! Or think of Ion Keith-Falconer, the brilliant scholar and athlete, who laid his abundant life at the feet of the Lord, and went out to Arabia

with a dominant desire to win the Moham-medans of that bigoted land for Christ. He lived but a few months, saw nothing but apparent failure, and seemed to hear the voice saying, "Thou shalt not build." Yet his life is now regarded by all men as one of the corner-stones of modern Moslem missions! Yonder in Yale University is a tablet to the memory of one of Yale's choicest sons, Horace Tracy Pitkin, whose life was laid down in the Boxer trouble in China, just as it was well begun. It stands there a record of the Voice which said to that young man in all the vigour of his consecrated manhood, "Thou shalt not build." But it is the record also of an impulse to hundreds of Yale men and others to follow Christ, to arise themselves and build His temple!

Yes! if we are but laying the foundations for the work of others, if our whole-hearted attempts make it easier and more possible for other lives to do His service, we may rejoice even in our frustrated aims.

Now there is more than a merely general

meaning, there is a daily significance in all this also to every one of us. For there is not one who does not realize at the close of any one day a bitter incompleteness in its life and work. We commence the day with high ideals, and set out to help in the building of His temple. But oh! how sadly we fail even of our own purpose! Yet, knowing all that we have honestly attempted, if we have not consciously shirked anything, I think the Lord says to us at the close of the day, with full knowledge of our perplexities, our oppositions, and our slender resources—"Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." Just as in that great day when we stand before Him with all of life passing under review, He will say "Well done!"—although we shall be conscious of so much that has not been even begun. That it is in our hearts, and to the fullest extent of His permissive will is expressed in our lives, is His satisfaction and our joy.

Let us then take up afresh our discarded ideals, those which have seemed impossi-

ble by their very loftiness. Let us keep in our hearts the noblest purpose we have seen in Christ our Light and Life. Let us live for the building of the temple of holiness and service ; distrusting our own powers but laying hold upon the sufficient reinforcement of God's grace in Him. Then shall He say to us in that day and every day, if we have lived with His will as our supreme desire, "Thou didst well, in spite of all mistakes and all deficiencies—thou didst well that it was in thine heart."

V

THE ETERNAL INVITATION

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”—MATT. xi. 28, 29.

THIS is, perhaps the greatest word of the Evangel. It is majesty set to music for the soothing of overburdened and fevered lives. It is Heaven's heart-ease for the healing of sinning and sorrowing men. No other of all the gracious words which proceeded from His mouth is consecrated so entirely by the experience of thousands in every age as is this ever-new invitation of the Son of God to the sons of men. For in every generation, each with its own peculiar spirit of restlessness, there have been those to whom these words have come as the solvent of all their perplexities,

the relief of all their sin-imposed burdens, and the saving assurance of the good-will of God toward them. Men have lived and died by their light, finding them a safe guide and a sufficient Gospel—and handing them on as the very torch of life to those coming on behind them. For they vibrate with the strong sympathy and perfect love of the Christ Whose entire comprehension of need and its cause gives to His invitation a deep significance which finds an answering deep in the heart of every man.

How keen is Christ's discrimination of the real problems of life. His clear insight and accurate estimation of things as they are, irrespective of their mere seeming, goes far to make Him the one unquestioned figure in the contemporary life of every age. For somehow His verdicts admit of no revision. When he has summed up a situation there is not another word to be said. And there is withal always the consciousness that He knows because He cares, that He reads the conditions truly because He is sincerely interested. Love is not blind, as is

sometimes ignorantly affirmed, but keensighted and with a power of clear, penetrating vision which misses nothing.

Thus it is that to-day, as in the days of His flesh, Christ detects behind the unceasing throb of the world's machinery, behind the feverish competition which makes the business of life a battle instead of a brotherhood, behind the clash of conflicting wills and the untiring search for knowledge, behind the fearful insecurity of present good and the restless anxiety as to the future, behind the never-ending rush toward material goals and the unquenched thirst for material pleasures in which the really serious concerns of life are for the time forgotten, behind all that seems to show that men do not care for or even think of the spiritual and eternal realities with which life is full—a yearning desire for fullness of knowledge and clearness of vision, for amplitude of strength and security of tenure, for regulation of life and certainty of its issue, which, taken together, all go to make up true rest of heart. Men do not commonly talk of these things

nor, indeed, hardly think of them, at any rate, in coherent order. But they are nevertheless the common consciousness of incompleteness which Christ simply takes hold of and articulates in His own matchless way. And His words come to the unrested heart with the soothing and strengthening influence of a breath from the hills of God.

And yet at first this invitation startles us by its seeming inappropriateness and contradictoriness. It seems inappropriate because rest is the one thing for which there appears to be little room or time in our modern life. There is no place to-day for the laggard, nor do the men of any quality desire to eat the poisoned bread of idleness. It seems contradictory, too, because Christ Himself has given us other ideals of life than the merely easy and untroubled. Has He not spoken of sending a sword and not peace? Is it not He Who has sounded the call to strenuousness? Does not His very revelation of the "should be's" and "may be's," of life inspire all

who accept His words to unending restlessness ?

But the very meaning which His own Life gives to His offer of rest harmonizes all that at first sounds discordant. For rest is not, as we are sometimes prone to imagine, a mere religious emotion divorced from practical concerns ; nor a fatalistic acceptance of the inevitable which paralyses effort ; nor a weak satisfaction with things as they are which strangles all right ambition ; nor a narcotic which destructively effects an escape from the serious duties of life ; nor an enervating ease which saps strength and unfits men for that labour which is God's ordinance, and hence their highest good. No ! Rest is none of these things, nor anything akin to them. It is rather that heart harmony with God which qualifies men for life's engagements, for its ceaseless conflict and conquest, for its fruitful toil, and for its noblest and highest purposes.

This is what Christ came to effect in men. This is the object of all His work and the

interpretation of all His passion. He Whose own life was at once the most unrestful and yet the most restful of all lives, offers to-day this paradoxical gift of rest in the midst of restlessness, and of calm in the heart of storm, to all who are worn out by their unaided struggles and weighed down by their unrelieved burdens.

It is important to understand that this strange gift of rest is at once immediate and progressive. "I will give you rest," that is, "on your coming to Me"; and "ye shall find rest," that is, "on your continuance with Me." The experiment of faith is to issue in an experience of rest which pervades every part of life until the whole is under its dominion, and until the peace of God reigns unhindered in the throne-room of the heart. As the tide setting in from the deep rises steadily until every dry inlet and creek along the coast-line is filled with the ocean's fullness, so is the experience of Christ's rest to increase and enlarge in the lives of His people. Some there are, however, who are continually harking back to their first

coming to Christ and to the memory of the all-pervading peace which then came to them, as though His first welcome had exhausted His power. At any rate, to them the gift of rest is distinctly in the past tense, and their present life seems to be entirely uninfluenced. Secretly they are unsatisfied ; and openly those to whom they should be Christ's witnesses are unimpressed and unconvinced. While all the time Christ's full invitation waits to be tested, and the depth of His "ye shall find" waits to be sounded.

No man has learned all there is of a language or its literature when he has but mastered the alphabet. And no man finds all that the rest of Christ is who is content with a mere casual acquaintance with the Son of God. For the relationship which is adjusted on our first coming to Him, must be strengthened on our side by a constant increase of the area of surrender, answering to increasing light. And it is in this ever-enlarging obedience that rest is increasingly found.

Christ's contact with life is always entirely practical. He knows its pressure and pain to the utmost. He knows, too, what is in men of power both to respond and resist. Underneath all its variations life is mainly made up of active toil and passive endurance. The world is peopled with but two classes—the labourers and the laden. To the one life appears as a business to be accomplished. This is its appeal and its compulsion. To the other life is a burden to be borne, often too heavy for their strength. And with fine discrimination Christ couches His invitation in terms which must find answer in the heart of every man. For those who labour are but too conscious of their need of that which shall fit them to do their work faithfully and to fulfil their task. While those who are oppressed by the weight of their cares know well that their burdens cannot be borne worthily apart from some timely re-enforcement.

It is to all such that Christ makes bold invitation. He claims that He can give an

inward rest to conscience and mind which shall recreate the labourer for his toil, and the sufferer for his endurance. And in doing so He puts Himself to the test of every man's faith. He is willing to stand or fall by the resultant experience of any who honestly take Him at His Word. How sure of Himself and how courageous He is as He moves among the throngs of strained and suffering lives with such an Evangel!

For primarily He is addressing Himself to the sin problem. Indisputably, sin is the cause of all unrest, the poison which has fevered every life. Sin is the root of all the weakness and weariness which rob life of its true quality. Sin it is which blurs the vision of God, and blinds men to His unfailing nearness and help, as also to the true issues of life, for the realizing of which they so much need Him. And when Christ offers rest to the weary and heavy-laden He is proposing to deal with the sin which has created their need.

Note how He does so. The words immediately preceding this gracious invitation

are the declaration of His saving method. "No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him"; therefore "Come unto Me, and I will give—and ye shall find rest!" In the restoration of forfeited knowledge of God is the secret of rest-giving. In living in the light of that restored knowledge is the secret of rest-finding. This is the supreme work of the rest-giving Christ, to reveal the Father. For in this everything else is accomplished. To the guilty He reveals the Father's love in contact with their sin, in His suffering, His planning, His sacrifice, and His patience. And with the dawning of this light there comes refuge and rest to the poor conscience-harried soul;—rest in the knowledge of a Blood-sealed forgiveness, and refuge in the certainty of the unchanged love of the Father.

Then to the toiler He reveals the Father's will in relation to his work. He assures him that even the meanest detail is part of the mightiest design. He declares that the

commonplace things of his ordinary duty are the objects of the Father's care ; that the most wearisome toil is canopied by His watchfulness ; that His judgments take everything into account and are inspired by His sympathy ; and that there is no mere chance of fate to the children of the Most High. And it is this assurance which brings him deep and unspeakable rest. For rest is not merely a mental inference from an abstract truth, but is an ever-increasing moral experience of a concrete fact.

Then to the sufferer He reveals the Father's mind in relation to His burdens, to those things which depress his spirit and darken his daily outlook. All are touched to fine issues as He interprets them as parts of the Father's purpose of grace. They are all weighed in the balance of His affection before being imposed. None of them is allowed to reach him without careful design. They are intended not to crush his life, but rather to create it by drawing out its fullest powers. Their purpose is

not to encumber but to enrich him, as he cheerfully bears them in the light of this revelation. They are not the sport of a ruthless force, but the solicitude of a righteous Father. Hence they are not burdens at all but benefits. In reality they are not weights to bind him to earth, but wings wherewith he may soar into sustaining fellowship with the Most High. Life's minutiae are love's ministry ; and the smaller as well as the greater burdens are all part of the expression of God. Things are not to be judged by their surface-value, but by their spiritual significance ; and this is only discovered as the radiance of the Father's love falls upon their seeming hardness. Then that which impeded will inspire ; and that which provoked life into a seething unrest will increasingly persuade to a rest of heart which is truest strength.

All this is implied in the linking of Christ's revelation of the Father with His promise of rest to the burdened. Ultimate certainty and absolute good are thus made the anchor-

ground of the soul. Firmly fastened there by the cable of faith, the frailest vessel will ride out the fiercest storm. For through the howling tempest the unfailing Voice is heard—"It is I." And there is rest.

Now there is a whole world of difference between a mental apprehension of all this, and a practical appreciation of its power. There are few who do not admire Christ's insight into human need, His discrimination of its cause, His entire understanding of the ways of the soul, and His revelation of the Father's love as the one and only answer to every question and quest. One may, however, do all this and yet fail utterly to realize aught of the rest He promises. It is possible to have convictions of knowledge which do not become constraints of obedience, and to suffer eternal loss thereby. Hence nothing is more important than a careful heeding of Christ's well-defined conditions for the translation of light into life, of things accepted into things experienced, of the ideal into the actual. And so simple they are—"Come! Take!

Learn!" A little child can understand them at once without difficulty. But it often takes men a long time to become as little children in practical obedience to a demand which is an invitation, and to an invitation which is a demand. For we stagger at "the simplicity that is in Christ"; and love's stepping-stones across the turbulent waters of unrest into the green pastures of peace become stones of stumbling to us. How true is it that—

"If our faith were but more simple
We should take Him at His Word;
And our lives would be all sunshine
In the sweetness of our Lord!"

And how true is it that many whose need of Christ is the greatest thing about them fail in this very thing,—Even though it seems as if He had been at pains to make a missing of the way of rest impossible.

"Come unto Me." This is the first step upon which all the others depend. Christ gently suggests that we have been living too far away from Him. It may be that our deeds have been evil, and we have in conse-

quence feared to "come to the Light." For conscience has sternly forbidden our drawing near to Him with sin-soiled garments and hands unclean with iniquity. Or, the lawful occupations of life, its duties and its delights, its tools and its toys, have become a positive engrossment to us. Every faculty and power is engaged to the utmost in the pursuit of profit or pleasure. If we have not discovered the secret of perpetual motion we have at least entered into the secret of perpetual unrest, and it has become the very atmosphere of our soul's life. Or, we have absorbed ourselves in our own concerns of joy or sorrow, and have selfishly shut ourselves off from every moral influence which does not emanate from them. But whatever be the cause we are living too far away from Christ ; whether in the solitary places of sin, or in the crowded marts of business or pleasure, or in the lonely and grim prisons of selfishness. The call to come to Him is the call to come away from that which has up to the present

enchained us, and from the environment it has created for us. It is a call to definite action, to the energy of choice, to the faith which expresses itself not in pious sentiment but in practical self-surrender.

And Christ gives rest to all who draw near to Him, whatever be the disqualifying experiences of sin and shame from which they come. For it is the glory of the Evangel that "this Man receiveth sinners," and that with Him they are immediately at rest.

"Take My yoke upon you." Life's central government must be changed if the old unrest is not to creep back into the forgiven heart, if we are to "find rest" in the still-present labours and burdens of which life is full. The Saviour must become also the Sovereign. The kingdom must be under His control. Having come to Him we must continue with him in practical obedience to His will, however and whenever apprehended. This is Christ's yoke, the easy yoke of obedience to His Father which He wore, and with which He invests His people.

But coupled with His "yoke" is His "burden" also. Strange though it appears, rest is to be found by those already yoked by strong bands to stern duty and toil in the taking of another yoke ; and by those already burdened in the taking upon them of another burden. What was and is the great burden of His own life ? Surely the weight of the sins and sorrows and travail of the world. The burden of the poor, the captives, the distressed, the victims of sin, injustice, and selfishness pressed upon Him unceasingly. And He bore them all, even into Calvary. This is the burden which He invites men to share with Him. "Get away from yourselves. Live for others. Share My travail over a lost world. Give yourselves in an unceasing ministry of sympathy and sacrifice to the needs of sin-bound souls," He seems to say : "And in so doing ye shall find rest from your own cares and burdens."

How little do we understand this—that there is rest for the labouring in labour for others, and for the burdened in bearing the

burdens of others. And how fragrant with the presence, and radiant with the rest of Christ, does the most ordinary life become when His yoke is taken and His burden shouldered. Weary toiler, restless with self's constant imperious demands, fevered with the mad rush of the life to which you are mercilessly driven by the spirit of the world, despairing of relief from the unshareable sorrow and care which have well-nigh crushed and broken your heart, try Christ's way. Take His yoke and begin to give yourself first to Him, and then to all who need Him in the world. Get out under His control and guidance into the dark places of the earth. Go out on to the mountains where the lost sheep wander, out where men perish for lack of the knowledge of love and life. There you shall lose all thought of your own burdens. There you shall find the sustaining rest which Christ gives—nay shares—with those who serve.

“Learn of Me.” And of this we cannot fail as the earlier steps are honestly taken. For as we company with Christ we instinc-

tively learn to refer everything to His judgment, and to test everything by His standards. This is, of course, a state rather than a step; for the lesson of life will never be fully learned—no, not in eternity. There is so much to unlearn and to undo, so much to get rid of and to acquire, that only the re-enforcements of unveiled fellowship such as Heaven will bring are sufficient to transform us into His likeness. But meanwhile to the man who is willing to learn of Him with a sincere desire to do His will, He will unlock the mysteries and perplexities, and will explain and interpret the contradictions of life in such a way as to bring an increasing rest to the self-burdened and world-wearied soul. Then from out of the depths of the rest which He gives, the satisfied heart cannot but re-echo this Evangel of love in the sweet tones of an indubitable experience. And thus does the combined testimony of the whole company of the redeemed become the harmonious Gospel of saving grace to a weary world.

VI

THE UNRECOGNIZED VICTORY

"They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him."—JOHN XX. 13.

THE Resurrection is the most essentially and entirely divine of all Christ's works. It stands out for ever as at once the mightiest miracle and deepest mystery connected with His redeeming work. The significance of its power is beyond all human conception or measure. For, if it be not true, the whole claim and promise of grace is confounded. But if it be true that Jesus burst the bands of death and revealed Himself as Death's conqueror, then all the claim He ever put forth is substantiated, and all the promise He ever made is confirmed. When we view its simple and stupendous action in the Gospel

records, we are face to face with the supreme revelation and measure of the divine power. Victory over sin and death, and a living hope for the sons of men, are its clarion notes of triumph. God in all His might is seen without any veiling medium. And we are at the same time uplifted in His greatness and humbled in our own littleness.

Yet its story of triumphant power is wonderfully interwoven with some of the most tender and human stories which the whole history of God's ways with men contains. For example, what could be more beautiful than the account of that Sabbath evening walk to Emmaus? And how often, indeed, has it been repeated in actual fact in this our own day, as disciples of Christ have walked together after worship on Sabbath evenings? Many a time has the Risen Lord walked with them just as of old, intertwining His friendship with theirs, and affording them indubitable proofs that He is alive from the dead! Or what more simple than the record of His appearance to the eleven in the upper

room, hallowed by such precious memory. Or what more heartening than His reassuring talk with the sorely-puzzled Thomas? Or what could bring His tenderness nearer to the hearts of His people than His persuasive questioning of the downcast Peter, or His kindly care for the hungry fishermen in the preparation with His own hands of breakfast for them?

All these simple and beautifully human stories are given to us as parts of the first Easter story, as though to emphasize the fact that the precious jewel of truth is to be set in the common and ordinary circumstances which go to make up the life of us all, that its beauties may be realized and reflected.

But of all these stories (whose simplicity and naturalness, be it said, are a large part of their credibility), perhaps the most moving and human of all is that of Mary Magdalene. During His lifetime she had loved Him much, being much forgiven. He had accepted the ministry of affection at her hands, and had enriched her, as is always

His way, by what He had taken from her. Now He is dead. And in the awful numbness of her sorrow she has, for the time, at any rate, forgotten all His promises of resurrection ; so she hastens to the tomb to lavish upon His dead body the love which His recent sufferings have fanned into a quenchless flame.

But, alas ! for her intentions—the tomb is empty. Hardly knowing what she is doing, she runs to the disciples and announces that His body has been taken away, that calamity has succeeded calamity, that any lingering hope of seeing Him again as of old is gone ! Forgetful, like her, of His foretold Resurrection, two of them—Peter and John—run to the tomb ; and having satisfied themselves that what she says is true, and accepting their first impressions as trustworthy, they go away again to their own home.

But Mary cannot leave the spot made so sacred by His association. She remains there to weep and to think of Him Who has for ever made the old life impossible to her,

even though she is never to see His face again. Through her tears, as through a mist, she sees two strange figures in white, but knows them not to be the heralds of the King Who is even at that moment coming to set up His Kingdom within her in a fuller and truer sense than ever before. They, for their part, marvel at seeing her tears at such a time ; for surely the night of weeping is gone and unspeakable joy has come with this morning. But to their question she can but respond with the hopelessness of despair—"They have taken away my Lord!" Then, turning round, for the first time she sees Him Whom her soul loveth in the beauty of His risen life ! Then when He has made Himself known to her and has convinced her that He is truly alive, Heaven opens indeed, and she sees "the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Now the point of this beautiful story of the first Easter morning is in the possibility of one who truly loves Christ so entirely misconceiving the great event,

She was in the presence of the greatest of all victories without recognizing it. The signs she saw were not of defeat but of triumph. But she misread them all. She had not lost Christ, as she feared, but had really found Him more fully than she had ever before known Him. She was not at the end but rather at the beginning of all things. It was a day for praise and great joy, not for weeping. She thought that the service she had come to render to Him in the tomb was now for ever impossible. But in reality there was opened to her that day a life of service greater and more far-reaching than all her wildest love-dreams. Yes! Hers[—]was the pathetic tragedy, so common in this our own day, of an unrecognized victory.

It is not too much to say that in all the churches, and outside of them too, there are those who seem unable to grasp the essential fact that the Saviour of the World is no longer the dead Christ of a bygone age, the central figure of a purely local event, but the Risen Lord, uncon-

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fined in His work by time or place, and universal in His scope and range of power. We are always in danger of misconceiving God's workings, as though they were the doings of others ; of seeing calamity in every change ; of being blind to all but outward things ; of imagining that a temporary darkness (necessitated by our own weakness of eyes) is a total eclipse. Now it is not faith, but faithlessness, which looks out upon the world to-day, and says in tones of concern, "They have taken away my Lord." As though He *could* be taken away ! Truly the greatest need, both in individual and corporate Christian life, is to know the reality of the Resurrection, and to recognize that He Who is "alive for evermore" is fulfilling himself in a thousand ways in the hearts of men. For He is bigger than our conceptions, and cannot be confined in our creeds. Hence, panic may well give way to praise, and concern to courage. For not only is He the Christ of the bounded past but of the boundless present also. We may al-

ways see the place where the Lord lay, and it is right we should often thankfully visit it. But we shall make eternal mistake if we imagine He is always to be found there, and there only. For such thought attests our failure to recognize the victory, and hence to share it.

“They have taken away my Lord.” This is frequently the language of those who think that Christ has been taken away by the growing apprehension of His Truth on the part of His people. Men do not lay stress to-day on doctrines which in former years were regarded as of vital importance. Language and phraseology have changed, and with them many of the formulæ of faith so dear to our fathers have become almost obsolete. The message of the Evangel is delivered with new-placed emphasis. Time-worn methods of expression are frankly abandoned in favour of others which seem more fully to reflect the mind of Christ Himself, and are certainly more easily understood and readily responded to by the men of the present. Under the influ-

ence of modern thought creeds are questioned, indeed, are often frankly abandoned; while character, and not orthodoxy, is insisted upon as the essential expression of true faith. Dogma is apt to be suspected, while the devotional life is urged. The old and terrifying doctrines of the sternness of God are, to an extent, discounted, or at any rate cast into shadow, by the discovery or re-discovery of His prevailing sympathy. The call to Christ in order to save oneself is replaced by the call to Christ in order to be fitted to save others. The Divine Fatherhood is being expressed in terms of the human brotherhood. And the Gospel of to-day insists that Christ came not to save men's souls with a view to their entering Heaven in the future, but to save men's lives with a view to their enriching earth in the present.

Now all this appears very sad and calamitous to many truly good people, who imagine the interests of the Kingdom to be bound up with certain well-defined articles of belief, and who are unable to appreciate

the difference between Truth and human appreciation of it—between the divine fact and the human form in which it is expressed. They think that the Divine Feet must always tread the pathway of their theology in His drawing near to men. In fact, their mistake is in believing that Christ has been taken away by the very development of men's conscious apprehension of Him. Whereas in reality He has been brought infinitely nearer. For as on that earliest Easter Day when Mary first made this now so common mistake, Christ is not in the grave but in the garden. He is not in the place of death, but in the place of life and growth and beauty. As in Nature life is always expressing itself in new forms, so the living Christ in the living world is always expressing Himself in ways of forceful and fruitful appeal to every age.

The Gospel of the Risen Lord rightly apprehended will save us from all unbelieving alarm, and will correct all anxious misreading of the miracle and victory of the

Life indeed. Mary went to the tomb expecting to find things there just as she had preconceived them. The revelation of the Risen Christ however falsified all her thoughts and magnified all her unspoken hopes. And still He lives to rebuke our faithlessness, and to end all our unworthy notions of His power, as the rising sun pales the morning star, its forerunner.

"They have taken away my Lord." This, too, is frequently the judgment of many, who conclude that their hard and severe experiences of life have robbed them of the Christ of grace and love. *Disappointment* Disappointment, disaster, and discouragement all seem to create for them an empty tomb. They have known Christ in His early gifts of peace and pardon, have sat at His feet to learn the elementary lessons of His Kingdom, have followed Him in the pathways of service, and have experienced something of His power both within and through them. But now all is changed. ~~The light of the morning has faded into cold gloom.~~ Unexpected experiences have

overtaken them ; and the Christ Whose love served them well in other days seems to be no longer available—at any rate effectively. Now, as a matter of fact, such ones, like Mary Magdalene, are in the presence of a miracle, and do not know it ! For the ~~Risen~~ Lord, Who long ago began the work of transformation in them, is really working by means of these very experiences to bring them into fuller and more intimate knowledge of Himself. They are missing Him by misinterpreting His ways.] George Macdonald puts into the mouth of one of his characters who is suffering the smart of sorrow and the discipline of suffering the petulant cry :

“ I wish I'd never been made ! ”

To which her friend replies : “ My dear, you're not made yet. You're only being made, and are finding fault with the Maker's process ! ”]

Now this is just what many are doing. They regard as perversity what is really a loving providence. They look upon a Divinely-meant beatitude as a blunder. Their

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backs are turned to the Risen Christ, while their eyes are fixed upon the empty tomb. In their quest they are missing the conquest. They are bewailing their loss when they might be beholding their Lord, and gaining in His fellowship a satisfactory explanation of all the perplexing things which have helped to make possible this knowledge of Him. For since He is alive, such things as He orders can never take Him away. Any idea to the contrary may always be regarded as a false conclusion, and resisted as disloyal unbelief.

When the history of the scientific discovery and attainment of the past decade comes to be written, one of the most striking chronicles will be that of the transformation of the by-products of coal-tar into perfumes, dyes, and drugs. Modern chemistry has taken the black, unlovely substance and, as with magic touch, has transmuted it into fragrance and beauty and usefulness. And this is but one of Nature's many parables of this Resurrection lesson! Let us be careful lest life becomes permanently

improverished by the tragedy of the unrecognized victory.

“They have taken away my Lord.” In what a different sense are these words sometimes used by those who are conscious that wilful sin has robbed them of all ~~conscious~~ enjoyment of Christ’s presence. Self-indulgence, absorption in some unsundered and unregulated pursuit of business or pleasure or rebellious self-will, have brought a desolating sense of lost purity, forfeited peace, and inner disorder. Truly, “they have taken away my Lord.” For Barabbas, who is the only alternative to Christ in every moral crisis in which choice is imperative, is always a robber! And no mere words can bring back the sense of Christ’s friendship nor the heart-influence of His nearness. The defiled conscience must be cleansed. The debilitated will must be strengthened into a new consecration. And only Christ Himself can effect this miracle. But He can! This is the Gospel of the Resurrection; that He Who of old cleansed the leper, strengthened the

paralysed, and raised the dead, is alive to do these same things for men to-day. How many there are who look wistfully back to boyhood's days of faith and purity when Christ seemed near and dear to them, and Heaven lay round about them. But much water has flowed under the bridge since those golden days, and between that time and this there stands a record of countless accusing sins; so that the heart, awakened to a disgust of its own weak yieldings, says in sorrow and despair, "They have taken away my Lord." If you are in such a case do not be tempted to think that the past is invincibly and eternally your master. Were it not for the Resurrection it certainly would be. But "now is Christ risen!" Hence there is a living hope of deliverance and full salvation for every bound and burdened one. He can take away the very things which appear to have taken Him away from you. And that He does so is attested by the experience of all who have ever drawn near to Him in penitence and prayer.

Oh! what a wonderful revelation of Himself did Mary gain, on the very heels of her greatest mistake! For He Whom she had imagined was for ever lost to her, gave proof of His intimate and undying care in the use of the old name by which He addressed her—"Mary." The Risen Lord gently reminds her of all the past, now so inextricably bound up with Himself, as though to encourage her to still greater trust in the One Who knows all about her, and Whose love surpasses His knowledge. Then, as in an impulsive way she stretches out her hands to clasp His, He at once lifts their intimacy on to that higher plane of spiritual fellowship, where she shall henceforth be independent of all external media in the heart-communion with Him, which is to qualify for all future life and service. And in His gentle rebuke, and to assure her again of the miracle of which she is the first witness, He proclaims a new and amazing blood-brotherhood—"My Father and your Father!" Nor is it to be wondered at that such a stimulus to the heart should

quicken the footsteps ; and that she who had at first failed to recognize the victory should now run to those who had heard her cry, " They have taken away my Lord," with the triumphant tidings " that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her ! "

Thus her awakening to the mightiest fact of all about the Son of God is just a picture of that correction of impulsive faithlessness, and expansion of imperfect faith which ever follows the revelation of the Living Lord to His people. As with her testimony, so too with theirs in this and every age. " They have taken away my Lord," gives place to the grand Evangel of the Resurrection, " He hath given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son ! " Nor will those who know it for themselves be content until they have sounded it forth throughout all His World. For the world's greatest need is to recognize the victory of the One Who liveth and was dead, and behold ! is alive for evermore !

VII

THE MAJESTY OF MERCY

"He healeth the broken in heart . . . He telleth the number of the stars."—PSA. cxlvii. 3, 4.

WHAT a surprising conjunction as a twin-attribute of God—active pity in the small circles of human experience and unmeasured power in the great realms of creation. God manifesting Himself in the remotest and nearest things of which we have any knowledge, the universal and the personal. At first sight there is something incongruous in the setting forth of these two things as having anything in common. For surely there can be little, if any, connection between the starry heavens above and the suffering hearts below ; between that which is so infinitely great and that which is so infinitely little ; between that of which no man

knows much and that of which all men know a great deal ; between that which transcends in its greatness all our thoughts, and that which in its bitterness touches all our lives.

But in thus declaring the majesty and mercy of God, the Psalmist is not indulging in mere flights of fancy, nor doing violence to the separate revelations of His power and love, as though these could ever be in contrast. For there is an underlying relationship between stars and sorrows which unerringly points to the overruling care of God. If we can rightly apprehend this it will direct our hearts into His love as their safe anchor-ground as nothing else could do.

It is the very glory of the Gospel, anticipated here by the Psalmist, but only fully revealed in Jesus Christ—that Heaven with its glories is close kin to earth with its griefs ; that Heaven with its holiness is always touching earth with its heart-breaks ; that the God of the stars is the God of the saints—and of the sinners, too ! More and more clearly does this light break upon us as we read the record of Christ's life and work, His unveiling

of the glory of the Father. He seems to be always at pains to convince men of the greatness of God that they may be subdued ; and of the gentleness of God that they may be wooed into surrender and submission to His claims upon them. The Father Whom He reveals is all majesty, but all mercy too. He is certainly the God of lofty transcendence ; but as certainly also the God of loving tenderness. His comprehension is universal ; but so, too, is His compassion. " He telleth the number of the stars " ; and by the same power " He healeth the broken in heart."

Hence this word of testimony from the early days of men's dealings with God, may well come to us interpreted by the light which Christ's Evangel sheds upon it, as just another of the many calls we are always receiving to the fear of God, to faith in Him, and to the acknowledgment of our indebtedness by the grateful yielding of life's total strength to His service.

There are popularly two current conceptions of God in the world to-day, neither of which taken by itself is either right or

adequate. On the one hand, God is conceived as being so remote from men in the perfection of His power and greatness as to have little if any concern with the trifling sorrows and cares of their lives. On the other hand, God is regarded as being so friendly, and, shall I say it? —human, that He is almost one of ourselves. In consequence of the one, He fails to get our love. In consequence of the other, He fails to inspire us with fear. If we are in danger of having a God too far off, we are also in danger of having a God too near—One with Whom familiarity has bred in our hearts a kind of affectionate contempt. We are apt to forget the God Who “tellethe the number of the stars” in our happiness at finding the God Who heals the broken hearts.

Now the man who falls into the error of conceiving God as being but the Great Architect of the Universe, One Who is far removed from the poor human concerns of which life is full, inevitably fails to realize His personal grace and care. Life for him may develop a sense of duty, but he never comes to regard

himself as a son of God, the child of His love. And what an eternal loss is his !

On the other hand the man who, while rejoicing in his personal experience of God's nearness and goodness, forgets that He is "the high and lofty One Who inhabiteth eternity," is inclined to lose sight of His superintending care and guidance in the larger things of life than those which are merely personal. Such an one is apt to be seized with panic, and to yield to a faithless pessimism which is the end of all noble endeavour, when things in the government of the universe seem to his mind to be going wrong. He loses sight of the conjunction of mercy and majesty ; and on this account loses grip on the situation of life, in which he might otherwise most usefully have served God's interests.

[An old writer has said that God has two thrones—one in the highest Heaven, the other in the humblest heart ! And we need always to remember this balance of truth, which is just another way of saying that "He telleth the number of the stars," and that "He healeth the broken in heart."]

THE MAJESTY OF MERCY III

Now the connection between stars and broken hearts is not so obscure as may at first sight be concluded; for there is a general likeness between them which is far more than mere poetic imagination. For instance, both are the common possession of all men. I mean that no one has a monopoly of the starlit heavens. Rich men, whose human instincts have not kept pace with their material prosperities, may fence in their land and deny to others access to mountain or glen. But they cannot shut out from the gaze of any the heavens above their properties. The brightest and remotest stars are the possession of the poorest and richest alike. So, too, are the sorest heartbreaks. From the prince in his palace to the peasant in his cottage, not a man amongst us is exempt from the ordinary workings of human experience. All of us, sooner or later, come to know what it means to be crushed, wounded, and broken. It is part of the price we pay for living.

Then, also both stars and heartbreaks bring men to a realization of their own

littleness and feebleness. Who has not gazed out on the starry skies in mid-ocean, or on some countryside where the smoke of the cities does not obscure the panorama ; and, beholding Sirius and Orion, the Plough and the Milky Way, has not realized his infinite smallness ; and has not said in the awe of great loneliness, " What is man, that Thou art mindful of him ? " There is nothing which makes a man feel so tiny and so powerless as the sight of God's myriad worlds—nothing, perhaps, but the heart-breaks of life, his own and those of others. For we stand silenced before them, utterly powerless to avert or alleviate them. They are as great in their power to teach us our limitations as are the stars ; and unite with them in this ministry.

Again, millions of the stars are hidden from our gaze even when we are assisted by strongest telescopes ; and as for counting them ! Well, that is entirely beyond all human power. How like our heart-breaks ! Their causes are often hidden, as their number is incalculable. Both are the secret

of God ; and both will drive us back, if we rightly consider them, to His saving majesty and mercy.

Now these simple and obvious analogies lead us to a clear and necessary understanding of the great fact that it takes the God of the stars to heal our sorrows, and to bind up our broken hearts. There is no greater folly than that of the man who ~~either cynically or in mere~~ *bravado* makes light of his heart's needs. The fact is, our needs are the greatest things we have—far greater than our possessions or accomplishments or desires. For our needs testify to our immortality. None more truly than does the need of our broken hearts for solid comfort and lasting assurance. Indeed, it is our heart-breaks which attest the fact that there is something within us which refuses to answer to material comforts or to be satisfied with anything temporal. It is this fact which establishes our relationship to God, Who has made us for Himself. We cannot comprehend His "telling of the stars," it may be. But we can understand the healing of our own heart-

throbs. And that which is intellectually incomprehensible is always spiritually necessary. For it takes the same power to do the one as the other. Instinctively in our hours of pain and loneliness and misery, it is to the greatness and majesty of God we turn for unfailing comfort. It is the stupendous might of His grace upon which we rely. For is He not the One to Whom great things are little, and little things are great?

Now in illustration of all this and to bring it home more closely to us, think of some, at least, of those causes of heart-break with which we are commonly familiar. It is in no mere exaggeration of emotion that a strong man cries out, "My heart is broken!" when all his inner being is undergoing a great revolution. For instance, when the conviction of sin is upon him; scourging him with its stinging lash, wrapping him round with its Nessus robe of condemnation, and haunting him with the sense of his sin-created exile from God and love and Heaven. Who does not know that kind of broken-heartedness?

Or, more commonly still, there is the heart which is broken and crushed by sorrow and loss. I came across one such some little time ago, who admitted me to the intimacy of his sorrow over a prodigal son—one who had left home and gone into sin's far country; and who, despite his father's love and prayers, had shown no signs of return. If ever I saw into a broken heart I did that day; and I had no difficulty in recognizing its kinship with Him Whose heart has long been broken over His prodigal children.

(Or, again, and still more commonly, there is the heart-break of the young man (for middle life and age have no monopoly in this matter) who feels that in his endeavour to live an upright and clean life he is contending against unequal forces; that temptation is stronger than his strength of resistance; and that failure and fall, with all its bitter humiliation, is inevitable. Many a young man, who bravely tries to turn a bright face toward others, weeps scalding tears in the secrecy of his own room at the discovery that he is in the grip of destructive

forces, and can in no wise liberate himself. His heart is broken, for he is an undone man.

Then there is the heart-break of betrayal ; when human love proves unstable, and the light seems to be blotted out of the sky, and all life to be drab and desolate.

And to us all, sooner or later, comes the heart-break of separation ; when death, with its ruthless blows and strange mocking silence, crushes the very life out of those who stand round the open grave, hopeless and paralysed.

Yes ! the heart-breaks of life are very many and very real ; and this mere mention of some of them attests the truth already stated, that it takes the God of the stars to deal with and heal them. He alone is able to bind up and repair the bruised life, and to set it free in the field of renewed opportunity to live and witness to the still greater reality of His compassion—which is just His power shot through with the light of His love. For the fact is, both stars and heart-breaks are definitely related to His central government. The stars, as we know, run their

courses and keep their places in the heavens entirely in virtue of their relation to the great solar centre. Thus it is that He telleth their number. So, too, is it with our many heart-breaks. They have a distinct and definite relationship to Him Who is the Sun of Righteousness. And it is only as that relationship is recognized by faith and love that we may know His healing power, just as the stars know His guiding might.)

(Does not our personal experience prove all this? What is it that has helped us in our most trying hours, when all has seemed lost or worthless of the struggle by which it must be held? What has made it possible to rise *and* above unkindly circumstance and *and* organize victory out of defeat? What has brought joy and peace into sorrow and storm? Surely just the great fact of God's majesty and mercy—His greatness and His grace; His sovereignty and His sympathy; His powerfulness and His pity. The certainty too, that all that might which "tellethe the number of the stars" is at the disposal of the "broken in heart" to help and heal

them. The assurance that it is offered to them in Jesus, God's full and final word of power. For He alone meets the need and answers the instinct of the life which, because it has been created for Him, can never find its comforts elsewhere.

"What can it mean? Is it aught to Him
That the nights are long, and the days are dim?
Can He be touched by the griefs I bear,
Which sadden the heart and whiten the hair?
About His throne are eternal calms,
And strong, glad music of happy psalms,
And bliss unruffled by any strife;—
How can He care for my little life?

"And yet I want Him to care for me,
While I live in this world where the sorrows be.
When the lights die down from the path I take;
When strength is feeble and friends forsake;
When love and music that once did bless
Have left me to silence and loneliness;
And my life-song changes to sobbing prayers;—
Then my heart cries out for the God Who cares."

Yes! this ever-present positive instinct of the soul, as well as its past experiences of His power, proclaims the great truth that the God of the stars, Who stoops and speaks to us in Christ, alone satisfies the aching need of any broken-hearted man.

And what is the ultimate significance of this message of the kinship of the stars of heaven with the sorrows of earth? Surely an inspiration to (hope and cheer and peace, in the knowledge that He Who nightly works a miracle before which all the knowledge of the ages stands baffled, is the very One Who cares and pities and stands by to strengthen the one who is broken in heart from any cause whatever. That He "healeth," with no thought of harshness,) or suspicion, or criticism, or of magnifying the fault which has caused the trouble, (or of condemnation. And that we may, by reason of our need, draw near and yet nearer to Him Who draws near to us in the person of His dear Son. We shall always find Him remote enough to awe, but close enough to satisfy.)

VIII

FAITH'S DEBT TO MEMORY

"I remember these things. . . therefore will I remember Thee."—PSA. xlii. 4-6.

VARIATIONS in human experience are always contemporary. That is why the Psalms is a book of ever-fresh interest to the men of all ages. The reflections of the inner life of which they are full, and the fluctuations of hope and faith and love which they express, find responsive echoes in every man's heart. For we all recognize in them something of our own experience, and find their language entirely suitable to our own sentiments. Circumstances change, and the setting of the human drama removes ; but the hearts of men are as hungry for love, as fearful of loneliness, and as earnest in hope and expectancy as ever.

This is why we turn to the Psalms again and again. Not because we are over-interested in David, but because we find ourselves there, and because we hear the voices of our own hearts speaking out to God and about Him. Indeed, for all the difference of age and environment most of the Psalms might well have been written right in the whirl of London's busy life. For they treat of its human problems just as surely as they tell of the meditations of the shepherd on the hill-slopes of Bethlehem. And none more so than the one of which these words form part. It is a bit of the autobiography of a depressed soul, of a man who has somehow become disappointed and disheartened in the enterprise of life. Everything has become burdensome to him. He cannot arouse himself to anything like energy. In some way or another, by sin or carelessness or defiant disobedience, he has lost the consciousness of God's presence. The experience of past happy days rises before him to haunt and taunt him. He is tempted while under the dark cloud which

has settled upon him to question the very existence of God, certainly to doubt the permanence of those things which in brighter days were inspiring influences. His enemies, taking him (as enemies always will) at a disadvantage, harass his sensitive soul by mockingly asking, "Where is thy God?" But ultimately his faith triumphs. He takes himself seriously to task—by no means an unhealthy thing to do in like circumstances, and says, "Why art thou cast down? If ever man had cause to know God's faithfulness, thou art the man. Hope thou in God! He has never yet failed thee, and never will. Hope thou in Him!" Then, aroused by his own sensible soliloquy, he goes on to draw upon memory to reinforce his faith. "I remember these things—the things which made me afraid and ashamed, the things which I have lost, and whose memory now depresses me. As I think of them my soul is cast down within me. But I am surely misreading their lesson. For God's grace and goodness have transcended everything else. The sun may be eclipsed,

but it is not extinguished. Therefore I will remember Thee."

When faith thus draws upon memory for evidence of God, faith is triumphant over all that tends to drag the soul down to despondency and despair. When faith summons memory to its aid it becomes invincible. Then the doubting soul takes wing and soars into the pure atmosphere of communion with God, Then it mounts far above the poisonous miasma of the valley into the brightness of His sunshine, where nothing of the deadly damp of doubt can live, but where the redeemed walk with Him.

Now I say that in human experience all variations are contemporary. There are always those around us who are depressed as the Psalmist was, living under the pressure of a burden which they cannot describe or always even account for. Full well do they know its weight and its weariness; and full well, too, do they know that their experience is a contradiction of Christ's assurance. But they have almost begun to regard their state as inevitable and unalterable; to wonder

whether effort of any kind is worth while ; and whether the solemn duties of life can be truly undertaken with an unfailing certainty of inspiration. They are saying in effect, " I remember these things. Memories of every kind—of sin and failure, and broken vow, as well as of undeserved grace, come crowding in upon me to enslave me yet more hopelessly. Every experience I recall seems but to add to the weight of condemnation which presses upon me. How gladly would I blot out everything if I could ! I remember these things only too well, and my remembrance is my undoing."

Well, I am glad to bring a message of hope to such ; and that not of a merely vague hope, but of power also. For in the Evangel of Jesus Christ there is sure promise of deliverance to all who are in bondage of whatever sort. For just as memory tends to enslavement as it dwells upon our sins, so in the power of His transforming grace memory may be made to tend toward emancipation. It is the glory of the Gospel that antagonisms become loyalties, and handicaps

become helps, when He is recognized as the Lord of the whole life in virtue of His redeeming sacrifice. Memory, with all the other capacities and faculties of a man, becomes "an instrument unto righteousness," when the man himself calls Christ "Master." For under His tutorship it acquires a new power of selection, and increasingly brings into the whole life the uplifting and sanctifying influences of God's love. These are the influences which alone can liberate the soul from that tyranny of doubt and depression and despair, which is not infrequently the prelude to utter moral collapse. Do not misunderstand me in this. I do not mean to say that every depressed soul becomes morally deteriorated. But I do say that such disheartenment as is caused by the insistent memory of past sin and failure is the kind of soil into which the enemy most fruitfully drops his noxious seed. And the result is often a tangled moral harvest, which ruins the whole field of life. How necessary is it then that we should learn the secret of self-protection by God-remembrance.

What a mysterious thing memory is ! It works spontaneously without any apparent stimulus, annihilating time and space, showing no regard for any circumstances—hence the invasion of holiest moments by unworthiest thoughts—and is entirely unresponsive to anything in the nature of control or restraint. It exercises its strange and often awful power unbidden and unchecked ; and, perhaps, its strongest fact of all is that it becomes both despotic and reproductive. By that I mean that what a man's memory dictates has a very large influence on what he does. If his prevailing memories are unholy his present life will inevitably tend toward unholiness too. But, thank God ! the converse is grandly true. If his most frequent remembrance is of the highest and noblest and worthiest things, so, too, will his life tend toward acquiring and achieving them. It is the literal truth that—

“ Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been, makes us what we are ! ”

“ What will you give me if I teach you to

remember?" was once asked of Themistocles. "I will give you all I have if you will teach me to forget," was the answer, full of the highest wisdom. For to acquire power over memory, and so to subdue it to 'the highest service is the greatest victory of all.' Now this is just the programme of Christ's Gospel; not to divest life of its mysteries, of which memory is one of the greatest, but to convert them from enslaving facts of power into emancipating factors of progress. For while He declares the forgetfulness of God in respect of forgiven sin, as a vital part of His message, He declares, too, the certainty of our remembrance of it; and goes on to proclaim the transformation of memory into faith's mightiest helper. For He promises that "the Spirit of Truth, Whom the Father will send in My Name, shall bring to your remembrance the things that will save you—the things I have set before you, the ideals I have pressed upon you, and the powers I have made available to you. He shall bring to your remembrance those things which shall help you to rise and run and

overcome. Memory and faith shall work together in His control unto your salvation."

This is Christ's covenant with men who are discovering the challenge and tyranny of their own past through the re-assertions of memory. He enlarges their vision of the past to take in God's share in our individual history, and to include all the stupendous wonders of His redemption. He helps us so that we "forget not all His benefits." Thus the one who says, "I remember these things, and cannot help myself," may learn to say also, "Therefore will I remember Thee!" In this way the forces of the past are utilised for present victory. In this way faith engages itself in eternal indebtedness to memory; so that men become "more than conquerors" over those foes which rise up out of the darkness behind them to beset and destroy them.

It is, of course, well known that the compasses of the great ocean liners have frequently to be examined and adjusted by experts in the science of magnetism. This is to ensure that the needle shall always point to the true magnetic north, and not be

deflected by the many strange influences to which it is exposed. Only so, indeed, can the navigation of vessels be safely carried on. In just the same way must our inner lives be adjusted by the sensitising and strengthening of memory ; so that under any and every influence we may remember God, and steer life's course arightly in relation to His Will, which is His love. Do not, therefore, allow memory to arbitrarily select its subjects. Challenge its subtle reasonings in the name of the Christ Who fills so large a place in the past. If sin is brought before your face as an awful condemnation, confront your accusing memory with the fact that it is behind God's back. Contradict the voice of memory by the voice of mercy ! Do so again and again until the deliberate becomes the instinctive. Do so until it becomes positive habit to remember Him, and an actual impossibility to recall the landscape apart from the sunlight.

Of course, there are many other causes of soul-depression beside the memory of old sin and failure—though this, I believe, is

the commonest. I am constantly meeting with those who are cast down by the prospectlessness of their lives. They seem to have no outlook of promise. Life ranges for them between the high walls of daily monotony. To-day is just the same as every day that has gone, and the prospect for to-morrow is no brighter, just dull and grey and unrelieved. They "remember these things," for they cannot get away from them.

And there are others whose depression is connected with material embarrassments. "I have always been worried about means," said a man to me lately. "I never seem to have quite enough for my honest needs. Business gets no better. Competition becomes keener and fiercer ; and my burdens seem to grow heavier every year." Is it any wonder that he and thousands like him "remember these things" ?

Others too, are cast down and in heaviness, because of the loss of earthly love, the failure of bright hopes, the wreck of some little vessel of hope which set sail so happily over a summer sea of promise. "Why does

God allow it all?" they ask, as they "remember these things," sometimes in bitterness, but oftener in anguish and heaviness.

Nor do I profess to answer these questionings. For could they be answered the riddle of life would be solved and its mysteries all disappear. But over against them all, and as the panacea for every heart-trouble, I would set the saving remembrance of God. Remember "these things" you must. But remember Him, too! And it shall be with you as when "the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness overcomes it not."

It is said that if one goes down into a sufficiently deep mine, the shaft of which is quite perpendicular, it is possible to see the stars shining at the top, even at midday. And I am perfectly certain that in the darkest of our dark circumstances and unexplained perplexities, we can always see God if we look for Him. Indeed, it is the very blackness around which serves to make Him the more visible. Just also as in Nature the balm grows near the thorn, so, where there is a

disquieting and debilitating memory there also is close at hand a remembrance that helps and refreshes and uplifts. But the ultimate responsibility of the selection will always be left to ourselves. The Spirit will at all times help our infirmities, but will never usurp our prerogatives. Therefore, let us set ourselves resolutely, in sheer dependence upon His enabling, to remember God. If we turn our faces to the light the shadows fall behind us.

In the Salon in Paris recently I saw a picture which moved me strongly. It depicted a rainbow spanning a wide expanse of sky, touching with one end of its arch a wild river in full spate, and with the other end a poor cottage home. In between, and covered by its span, was a whole countryside teeming with varied life. Its title, "Where the Ends of the Rainbow Rest," seemed to suggestively illuminate, for me at least, some of life's mysterious things. For it reminded me that all its limitations, its bereavements, its restrictions, its monotones, are under the arch of His loving-

kindness. The rainbow of promise rests upon them.

To remember all this is to make faith's conquest certain, for it is to be in the close following of our Lord Christ Himself. He is our Forerunner and Example in this as in all things else. Think of the memories which must have crowded in upon Him day by day, the causes of depression which had been quite reasonable. And think, too, of the memory which for Him outweighed them all—"I am not alone; the Father is with Me." Oh! remember that even your loneliest pathway is not trackless. There are footprints for your guidance; and they are His. Remember Him! This is the answer to the condemnation of unfulfilled responsibilities, missed opportunities, misused endowments, and misdirected capacities. Mere words will not banish such memories. Mere resolves will neither answer nor exclude them. But the memory of God in Christ will. And that it does so is the testimony of the whole company of the ransomed.

IX

UNCONTESTED SOVEREIGNTY

"I wholly followed the Lord my God."—JOSH. xiv. 8.

THE story of Caleb is one of the noblest of the Old Testament records of men of faith. Commissioned in company with others on the borders of the Land of Promise to spy out the land, he along with Joshua refused to yield to the faithless fear which overtook the rest. They saw the desirableness of the land but were overcome by the difficulty of its conquest. They saw the giants, and themselves as but grasshoppers by comparison; and their hearts failed them. Their report was consequently adverse to advance, and the panic-stricken people acted upon it. Caleb and Joshua however dissented from their advices

—a course which demanded nothing less than the courage of faith on their part. For to be in a voluntary minority in great moral and spiritual issues takes heroism of no common sort. Such heroism is only born of a simple trust in God. Caleb and Joshua saw the giants just as the others did, and knew themselves too to be but as grasshoppers—but they saw God also! The ten saw God, if at all, only through the difficulties of the situation. These two men saw the difficulties through God. In the one case the difficulties minimized God. In the other God minimized the difficulties.

All of which is an illustration of the way in which men of faith and men without faith look out upon life and determine their conduct. The men who do not allow their vision of God to be beclouded by anything external and material are constantly saying with these two, "Let us go up at once and possess the land, for we are well able to overcome it." These are faith's heroes. For without doubt Caleb and Joshua stood alone, scorned and derided by a faithless

people, always ready to follow the faithless leaders who recommended to them the ever-popular 'line of least resistance'; and whose influence on the subsequent course of the nation's life is too well known to need pointing out. History always sets an unerring verdict upon such moral mistakes as were made at Kadesh-Barnea, whether by men or nations. And the plainest man among us can always read it.

Moral heroism which yields uncontested sovereignty to the claims of God has in itself the assurance of ultimate victory and prosperity. In that hour of such magnificent resolve, faith received a promise of reward to which Caleb and Joshua clung throughout all the weary years which elapsed before they were again on the borders of the Promised Land. Its accomplishment often seemed far-off and remote. Yet during those years the testimony of one at least of them is that he "wholly followed the Lord." The original purpose of his life was undaunted and undiverted. All the way through the wilderness-wanderings he

was true to the light and cherished the promise. The undivided allegiance of his heart was never withdrawn from God. Faith and patience were in invincible alliance.

Now the end of the toilsome journey is in sight, and he claims from Joshua, who has become the leader of the people, the fulfilment of that promised reward on this ground alone—that he has without reserve followed the Lord. This is the claim which can never be refuted, whether in Caleb or in us. For all spiritual inheritance is conditioned upon unweakened faith and unwearied loyalty. These are the golden keys which at all times unlock the divine treasures to the poorest.

One of the greatest needs of our modern Christian life is that of recovering the sense of obligation to whole-heartedness which seems to be so largely lost. Men are satisfied with being party to the merely initial relationships of discipleship. They are content to know Christ as Saviour in a general sort of way, and to live a life which

has a kind of drift Christ-ward. But there is nothing strenuous about it. There is no compelling constraint. It is at best a haphazard thing with nothing of serious purpose and endeavour. They may be following Christ, but they are obviously not following Him loyally. They may be truly His, but are certainly not wholly His. And there is a tremendous difference between being truly His and wholly His. There are multitudes of people who are His in the sense that they trust Him for salvation, receive His gifts, and are numbered among His followers, who are, however, in no wise wholly His. ~~By that I mean that there~~ are realms of their lives which Christ has never been allowed to invade, stretches over ~~which He has no control whatever.~~ He is present in their lives to a limited extent, but is neither prominent nor pre-eminent there. He may be their undoubted Saviour, but is far from being their uncontested Sovereign. For "other lords" successfully claim their devotion and dominate their doings. Hence their weakness and ineffectiveness as

Christ's witnesses. For it is only the men that wholly follow Him who make any impression for Him upon the world's imagination and life. They alone are strengthened and satisfied with the gifts of which His fellowship is full. Everything depends upon the degree to which discipleship goes.

Compare such half-hearted lives with this testimony of Caleb, a testimony that has nothing of egotism or self-consciousness about it, but is just the plain declaration of an undeflected aim. He was speaking before people who knew him well, who had seen his manner of life during those years, and doubtless had marked its course sufficiently carefully to contradict such profession had it been in conflict with fact. That they did not do so is eloquent tribute to his quality. "I have wholly followed the Lord" is certainly the unrebuked testimony of a good conscience. It is the witness of a man who has never steered except by the Pole Star, who has never neglected to measure his life by the line of God's stan-

dards, who has never contradicted the original intention and inspiration of his life ; and who has lived out his life before men blamelessly. It does not profess a perfect attainment, only a perfect aim. It simply states that he had allowed no distance to come between him and God—distance of the sort which is created by knowledge of His will acquired but unacted on. As he followed Him the light of course grew clearer, his powers of perception became acuter, and his obligation consequently expanded. But he met increasing light with increasing consecration. He replied to enlarged responsibility by enlarged concentration of his powers upon the life-business of obedience. Such a man of necessity stands alone for the most part, caring nothing for unpopularity. For to be single-minded almost always means being single-handed, in a world where men ordinarily fear the Lord but worship their own idols. But he had learnt the secret of endurance, which is to see “ Him Who is invisible.” He had caught and kept the

vision which always comes to the pure in heart. As he wholly followed the Lord, he saw Him in ever-increasing certainty. Thus his heart was made constant as his path was made clear.†

And if, when we see the way of the Lord, we too set ourselves to the happiness of walking in it, cost what it may, most of the perplexities of life will disappear. Despite the clamorous voices all around us, there is always a plain path for willing feet. It is the way of the Cross. It is the pathway of Jesus. Away back in the dim ages of revelation, Caleb anticipated the spirit of Christ in his carefulness of undivided allegiance to God, and his carelessness of the shame and scorn of men. To the claim of such unmixed faith and unqualified obedience His spirit always responds in strength. Now do we not need to recover this attitude and its consequences to-day? In ordinary home-life is there not need of this spirit to witness against the many who compromise principle in order to avoid social unpopularity? In business-life is Caleb-like loy-

alty to God not called for, where men so commonly withhold from God lest other men should withhold from them? Is it not needed, too, in the ministry, which is full of the temptation to expediency in order to obviate unfavourable verdicts? Yes! A revival of the spirit of Caleb in men who will "do right, if the sky falls"; who will give uncontested sovereignty to the Lord; who will follow Him through thick and thin in a victorious minority, is the greatest need of Church and world alike. The witness of a life in which He is the unquestioned Lord is within the power of all. And it is simply irrefutable in its proclamation of His salvation.

For when a man wholly follows the Lord inevitable consequences of his consecration are seen in his life, and are easily recognized by those who are looking on. In the first place such an one is delivered from the bondage of self. As most of us know by hard-won experience, we never really enjoy liberty until we submit to the law of God. This is true in every realm and sphere of

our lives. The only possibility of liberation is in running the way of His commandments. Self-pleasing tends to self-weariness, and ends in utter captivity. Until the man who lives to do his own will without any reference to God, finds himself held hand and foot in strong fetters of his own forging. It becomes morally impossible for him to break the chains with which he has bound himself. He is in the grip of a tyrant, a strong man armed, who can only be dispossessed by "The Stronger than he." To all such the Gospel of deliverance is phrased in an exhortation to wholly follow the Lord. For—

"Self is the only prison that ever can bind the soul!

Love is the only angel which can bid the gates unroll!

And when He comes to call thee, arise and follow fast!

His way may lead through darkness, but it brings to light at last."

To wholly follow the Lord is to be led out into the glorious liberty of His sons.

Further, every costly obedience strength-

ens moral fibre and increases moral vigour for further obedience and conflict. While the converse is warningly true also. For every disobedience, however apparently trifling, hinders the ministry of Christ's grace in our hearts. Here is the awful potency of wilful sin, that it can put the Son of God to defeat and thwart His saving purposes. I had this brought home to me once in going through a large spinning-mill. There I saw the delicate operation of reeling a number of fine linen threads, some three or four thousand, on various spools. As I watched the process with considerable interest, the machine suddenly stopped working. One of the delicate threads had snapped; and the machine was so finely adjusted as to stop automatically whenever a single strand broke. Nor could it be re-started until the broken thread was mended. And this mechanical process illustrates very clearly the spiritual principle. One known disobedience allowed, one condemned habit persisted in, one wrong relationship maintained, one unchecked

indulgence which conscience has begun to question, and the ministry of Christ's grace is suspended. Yes! Our entire spiritual and moral well-being depends on just this whole-hearted following of the Lord, in which Caleb is our example. To fail here is to fail entirely.

Then ~~also~~ the man who wholly follows the Lord will certainly become like Him. This is the open secret of all transformation of disposition and character. There is reflective and reactive power in every spiritual resolution. As we follow Christ we cannot fail to acquire moral qualities which increasingly approximate us to Himself. Habitual fidelity to His commands is a purifying stream which enriches and fertilizes the whole of life's area. For unworthy ideals are replaced by His pure and lofty purposes. Imperfect powers are re-enforced by His gifts. Feeble efforts are made effective by His co-operation. All life is renewed unto holiness as men follow Him with girded loins and undivided hearts. When He is uncontested King He makes

them unquestioned conquerors. Transcendent glory becomes triumphant grace. Caleb became a godly man by following God—and there is no other way.

Then also there are spiritual inheritances which are only possessed as we wholly follow the Lord. Hebron was promised to Caleb, because of his faithfulness. After forty-five years of whole-hearted discipleship he came to claim his possession on this title. And his claim was allowed. All of which has a clear analogy in our lives. There are Hebrons which are ours under the promises of God. There are possessions in Christ—unsearchable riches, abundance of grace, power for the overcoming life, and all things that pertain to life and godliness. But they only become ours in actual experience as we follow Him exclusively. They are truly ours under the Covenant—but only ours in actual enjoyment as we fulfil our part of that Covenant. The Gospel “whatsoever ye shall ask” is entirely conditioned by obedience to “whatsoever I command you.” We impoverish ourselves

beyond description if we allow anything to contest Christ's sovereignty in life. All things are ours when we are wholly His. To follow Him wholly is to become a prince. To do aught else is to become a pauper.

But every such spiritual inheritance brings with it new conflict. The Anakims still lived in Hebron ; and Caleb in claiming his possession says, " If the Lord be with me I shall be able to overcome them ! " The land is his, but he must drive out the invaders and put them to the sword. Titular right must be made actual by his own effort of faith. And so it is again with us. Every new step in the spiritual life means new contest. Every position which faith affirms will be certainly challenged by the enemy. Every new blessing claimed becomes a battle-field—but in the battle we do not fight alone. Like Mistrust and Timorous, we are apt to come up to some House Beautiful only to find lions in the path ! And like them too we are often terrified and say, " The further we go, the more dangers we meet, so we are turning back ! "

While all the time we are losing an enrichment beyond anything we have ever known in the certain issue of the conflict. The enemy must be dislodged again and again. Defeated in the plain he takes to the hill—but the hill is ours, and he must be routed. Hebron is God's gift to us ; and if we are in earnest about possessing it we shall find, as Caleb found, that " He has made us mighty, and stronger than the strong." Only, we must not shirk the battle. If we do we shall lose the blessing. To follow Christ wholly is to share in His victory, but not without ourselves being bruised. But the scars are "honourable scars." They are "the marks of the Lord Jesus."

One other aspect of Christ's uncontested sovereignty remains to be noticed, that of His definite, clear, and unmistakable call to service. To follow Him wholly means for each follower the joy of giving as well as of getting, the privilege of doing His work in the world. For some it means the foreign mission-field. It could not mean anything else, seeing there are yet eight hundred

millions who have never yet heard His Name. For others it means the taking up of neglected tasks, and the search for His lost ones at home. For all it means a life lived out for the salvation of the lost ; and a self-sacrifice by which alone the blessings of His redeeming sacrifice can ever be brought near to men. To follow the Lord wholly means nothing less than having no will of our own in respect of time, place, or manner of service. But this is the life of unalloyed happiness and unclouded peace. This is the life, radiant with love-light, which becomes the guide of weary souls ; leading them to Him Who welcomes them all and saves them. This is the highest life of all. How aptly do George MacDonald's words describe the struggle of a soul that has caught the call to follow Christ, and fears to give Him the right predicate !

“ I said, ‘ Let me walk in the fields ! ’
 He said, ‘ No ! Walk in the town ! ’
 I said, ‘ There are no flowers there ! ’
 He said, ‘ No flowers—but a Crown.’
 I said, ‘ But the skies are black,

There is nothing but smoke and din !'
And He wept as He sent me back ;
' There is more,' He said, ' there is sin.
I said, ' But the air is thick,
And fogs are veiling the sun !'
He answered, ' And souls are sick,
And souls in the dark undone.'
I said, ' I shall miss my way,
And friends will miss me, they say !'
He answered, ' Choose to-day
If I am to miss you, or they.'
I cast one look at the fields,
Then turned my face to the town.
He said, ' My child, do you yield ?
Will you leave the flowers for the Crown ?'
Then into His hand went mine,
And into my heart came He ;
And I walk in a light divine
The path I had feared to see."

The choice is left to us. The issue is absolute. " Follow thou Me," says Christ, and as He says it, He well understands the reconstruction of life it involves. But still He says it in perfectly consistent love. For this necessitated reconstruction is our salvation.

And when we get Home along this pathway, when the Heavenly Hebron is ours, and all life's battles are over and done with ;

when we see Him as He is and know even as also we are known, it shall be our eternal joy to be numbered among the Calebs who wholly followed the Lord. The uncontested sovereignty of that glad day shall be but the continuation of His reign in these our lives of conflict and cloud. Heaven shall not recreate but only repeat the present testimony of those who "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

X

TRAGIC FAILURE

"Sleep on now and take your rest."—MATT. xxvi. 45.

IN nothing does the Bible proclaim its divine origin more clearly than in the frequency and variety of its warnings. By precept and example it seeks to impress upon us the great seriousness of life, and points out the tragic possibility of failure and irreparable loss which is the under side of its privileges. Just as the lightship or the burning flare is placed in the vicinity of a wreck to warn navigators of the nearness of danger, that they may steer clear of it, so along the track of life which the Bible outlines with such saving clearness are placed many warning flares in the shape of lives which have somehow failed of the grace of

God. If we rightly receive their warning, and seek to avoid the causes of their undoing we shall be doing something at least to fulfil the impicates of that grace which comes to us by Jesus Christ, the grace which co-operates with every honest and sincere endeavour of ours unto certain victory.]

[One of the clearest and loudest warnings which reach us is that of the failure of the men who during His lifetime were closest to Christ in privileged intimacy.] From the beginning they shared his life as no other ones could. They were with Him when their fellow-believers were excluded. They heard and saw things hidden from all other eyes. He gave them uncommon proofs of His confidence and affection. They, above all men, should have known the inwardness of His prophetic statements regarding His own end, and the imminence of the hour. And they, more than any others, ought to have been lifted above anything like failure at the time when He most needed them. But they failed, and failed

entirely, despite every privilege they had enjoyed and every profession they had made. Their failure is one of the strongest voices which come to us down all the ages, bidding us "take heed."

The circumstances are well known, forming as they do part of the record of the Lord's Passion. Jesus was in the very heart of His life's crisis. Events were moving rapidly toward the predestined issue. In a few hours all would be over ; and in the last great struggle of His soul He sought the aid of human intercourse. He Who had poured out His own love so freely sought for Himself some heartening cordial of human devotion as He entered upon the agony in the garden. We all know something of what this means. If we only have a hand to hold when we are passing through some crisis of grief ; if we only have someone upon whose affection we may lean and rely, how much more supportable is the sorrow !

[How truly human is Jesus in ~~this~~ His longing for the watchful presence of some

who have been awakened into responsive affection by His love. And how pathetic and tragic is it that in that hour, when all was darkest and hardest, He should be disappointed. Three times He came to the men to whom He had accorded the high honour of watching with Him, and three times He found them asleep. In His loneliness and isolation, three times He came to them, as though to refresh His heart by fellowship with them—and three times they failed Him. Back into the garden He went to His solitary conflict, saddened and disappointed. Alone He fought His fight, and alone He won the victory; while they forfeited for ever by their sloth, the privilege of sharing in it to any degree whatever.

What a failure! And what a heart-piercing rebuke! as in that hour of victory, which was so soon to look like utter defeat, He said to them, "Sleep on now! The hour of your great opportunity and of My great need has gone, never to return. Sleep on now as long and as soundly as you

may. You have missed your chance of ministering to Me. But angels embraced it, and did what you might have done. Sleep on now and take your rest."

This is not irony. Christ may sometimes have used irony in His speech to men. Indeed, He certainly did on occasions to those whose hearts were hardened in pride and self-esteem. But He was not ironical in that hour of His disciples' failure. He spoke out of a broken heart—broken by disappointment, and sad for the men who had themselves lost what eternity could never recover to them. This was, in truth, part of the bitterness of the cup which He had drained. And so He bids them sleep on, for their slumber now does not matter. However wakeful they become, they cannot regain their lost opportunity. (They have missed the golden chance of ministering to His need; and at the same time of acquiring a knowledge of Him which the future would never hold for them. For the future, however carefully guarded, never atones nor makes up for the neglect

of past days. For all time these men are not what they would have been, had the hour found them ready and alert with the keenness of a warm love to Christ. Their loss is eternal.

But in what did their failure really consist? For it is only by discovering this that we can apprehend rightly the warning for which the whole incident stands. They failed in intelligent understanding of Christ's plainest words. He had told them that betrayal was at hand, that the forces of evil were gathering against Him, and that danger and death were near. But they did not seem to grasp it; for had they done so it is unlikely that they should have yielded to the temptation to slumber in that hour of all others. You do not find a mother going to sleep when the doctor has told her that the sick child's life hangs by a thread. You do not find the anxious watcher, to whom the flicker of a loved one's eyelid is significant, going to sleep. Love breeds a vigilant anxiety. Affection's head always wears an uneasy

crown. ~~Let it be said, with frankness which may seem almost brutal,~~ these men failed because their love was not keen enough to interpret Christ's words, and to recognize that their hour, like His, had come.

rumor
Now [the history of most failures is the history of unrecognized and neglected opportunities.] For opportunities do not come to us preceded by heralds which prepare us to receive them worthily. The hour which is big with a crisis of fate usually looks just like one of the ordinary hours of the day, and gives no hint of its greatness. [The disguise of the commonplace tests both our powers of perception and our readiness of action. The tragedy of many lives is that its truly high hours come and go without evoking any semblance of recognition on our part.] It is true that, like the disciples in the garden, we are sometimes awakened when they are gone beyond recall ; but only then to hear the Voice saying, " Sleep on now and take your rest ! You slept when it mattered tremendously that you should watch. Now you may go on sleeping, for your un-

watchfulness doesn't matter one way or another!" [In business, in politics, in friendship—indeed, in all the realms in which men live their lives, this tragedy is being frequently enacted. And to it is traceable how much of the world's sadness and unavailing regret?

For instance, could anything be more pathetic than the case of one who has been awakened by the rude hand of death, to see how he has for ever lost the opportunity of repayment and response to a love which has enriched his life, but which he has always taken as a sheer matter of course? I met such an one recently; and his remorse is one of those things I shall never forget. He was a young man whose mother had toiled for him, sacrificing everything of ease and comfort, in order to give him a college education. Somehow or other he had failed to see the pathetic sacrifices she made for him, just accepting them as an ordinary thing—until she had gone. Then how bitter the wail of his awakened heart: "Oh, that I had not been such a blind

fool! I never meant to be ungrateful! I never meant to be selfish or thoughtless or unappreciative! And now I can never tell her all I'd love her to know, or give her all the affection I would lavish upon her!" And if the unhealed pain of a heart which awakens too late to repay the debt of human love is great, what of the bitterness of the life which misses Christ through lack of moral heroism and discerning love?

"Sleep on now and take your rest." These words reveal the failure of a true consecration; for there is no doubt whatever that these men were sincerely consecrated to Christ. They had at the commencement of His public life left everything in order to follow Him; and had, in fulfilment of their early vows, shared much of His toil and poverty. Just prior to their great failure they had heard from His own lips, under the most solemn circumstances, about that which should shortly befall Him. And having heard it all, they responded without demur to His invitation, "Rise, let us be going"; though they

knew it meant going to danger and to death. In face of such a courageous declaration of purpose there can be no question whatever of their devotion and consecration to Him. Nor yet of their sincerity, when they said, "We will die with Thee." They honestly meant to follow Him fully. But they broke down at the very first test to which their consecration was subjected.

And why? Because they did not understand the very elementary fact that consecration means conflict. They did not realize that resolves, however pure and high, are of themselves unstable; that enthusiasms will evaporate if not translated into actions; that visions are volatile unless they are forthwith changed by obedience into vitality. They were carried along by these things until the test came. And what a simple test: "Tarry ye here and watch!" If Christ had bidden them do some great thing, how much more likely they would have been to win out. But it is always the case that the highest devotion is tested by the most

trifling duties, and attested by the humblest deeds. Just here they failed where so many others fail too. For consecration to Christ means doing small things as well as large from the high motive of love to Him. It means strenuous co-operation with Him in conflicts which are His and ours in common. It means the serious application of every power to the business of living. It means nothing less than "resisting unto blood, striving against sin," always re-enforced unto the strife by the power of His Spirit.

Now there is a very real danger of failure upon the part of many whose desire of consecration is entirely sincere; just because they do not understand that true consecration is not of the nerveless sort, which wastes its energy in singing and outward show of piety; but of the heroic and striving sort, which dares things and does them for Christ. Its chief abode is not in the sanctuary but in the street. It may find its beginnings in the cloister, but it pursues its course amid the crowds,

Granted that it is often born in an ecstasy, yet it always lives in an encounter ; and by its own fierce and unending struggles develops energy and strength. Much of our modern hymnology is doubtless responsible for those mistaken ideas about the consecrated life, which are the forerunners of its most deplorable failures. We sing of the blessedness of trust in Christ, of the bliss of resting on His finished work, and of the gladness of a life in which He "does it all",—forgetting that He only does it through us. It is our own feet that must tread upon the lion and adder, and our own hands that must grasp and wield the sword. Let it be granted that the postulate of the life is "I can of mine own self do nothing." But let it be remembered, too, that its complementary axiom is, "I can do all things through Christ Who strengtheneth me." It is by not interpreting their own vows in the light of these truths that so many fail when the opportunity of service tests them. The hour finds them engrossed, absorbed,

asleep ; and each failure unfits them for the next test.

Nor is it to be wondered at that the disciples who could not watch with Christ in secret for one hour failed so conspicuously and publicly a few hours later ; one of them by denial and blasphemy, and the others by craven fears which left Christ to stand alone. For life is a solidarity. One moment is definitely related to another, as links in a chain. We are always sowing acts which reappear in harvests of habit and character. And part of the Nemesis of the failure is the deep consciousness that the Voice which says, "Sleep on now and take your rest," is saying the only thing there is left to say.

"Sleep on now and take your rest."

There is hardly any experience so bitter as that of waking out of self-indulgent slumber to find that some supreme opportunity has been for ever lost. For conscience, with unerring instinct, invariably points out the secret cause of the costly absorption. We see, when it is too late, the real inward-

ness of the call of Christ and of the offer of privileged service which He made to our undiscerning and unready hearts. For instance, there comes an impulse to speak out boldly in defence of His cause to a company who are deriding and making light of it. Or to warn faithfully some young fellow who seems to have slipped his moorings and to be drifting toward evil. Or to make some sacrifice (how trifling and unworthy the name when compared with His!) on behalf of His work. Or to re-echo His invitation to one who is at life's cross-roads, and peculiarly ready for the message. Or to bear testimony to the reality of His salvation to some maimed and broken life who needs Him more than all the world. Or to alleviate the distress of one of His poor. But somehow the hour finds us asleep. We are absorbed in some selfish passion, pursuit, or play. The claim of Christ unsuccessfully conflicts with our convenience. Our devotion to Him is not so strong as to overcome our

drowsiness. So he speaks to us by these voices of need in vain; and we miss the priceless opportunities which are the expression of His grace.

But invariably we awaken to our loss, for Christ loves us too well to have it otherwise. We almost always come to know what might have been, had we but been wakeful and ready in our love to Him. The influence which our courageous word might have exerted; the young life which might have been rescued from unspeakable sin; the joy which our gift might have brought to some weary toiler; the soul which might have been saved had we but accepted the privilege extended to us—all life's "might have beens" sooner or later come back to us, and unite in speaking our bitter condemnation—"Sleep on now and take your rest." We get to know, when it is too late, that Christ has been asking us to watch with Him, and that we have preferred our ease.

It is but a truism to say that though we may condemn ourselves for our sinful

folly with all the zeal of a newly-awakened conscience, we cannot bring back the unimproved hour. He may forgive and forget too—such is the power of His love. But by the same token He makes it impossible for us to forgive ourselves or to forget. Indeed, the abiding memory of failure is that which becomes the strongest constraint to future watchfulness and victory. And how impossible it is to “sleep on now,” when once the awakening touch of Christ has come to us! Conscience is far too active now to admit of slumbering. Even if we did give ourselves to sleep now, our sleep would be haunted by the dream and nightmare of our lost opportunity. No! the fatal sleep has lost its fascination; the unshared bread has become insipid; the ungiven gold is cankered; and the unspoken word has turned its sword-edge into our own bosoms. The things for which we have sold for ever our privilege of ministering to Christ have lost all their attraction and value. Henceforth we see in them our enemies—and His; and

henceforth their very nearness stings us into wakeful readiness to "redeem the time."

How clearly this is seen in these men to whom Gethsemane always stood out as the scene of their greatest failure. When later at Pentecost the Holy Spirit took possession of them, controlling their lives in impulse and action, and quickening their memory in restraining and constraining strength, there seems to have come to them a saving sense of an ever-present tendency to repeat the early failure of their consecration. It expresses itself frequently in their writings, as they urge upon others the lessons of their own lives. "Be sober; be vigilant!" "Let us not sleep as do others!" "Look to yourselves!" "Keep yourselves from idols." All of which are for our warning, lest we, too, fail Christ; and slumbering, lose the honour of a ministry to Him which never recurs.

But while it is true that we do not regain the lost opportunity, it is also true that Christ's love is constantly expressing itself in confidence toward the repentant and

forgiven disciple. It is a large part of the glory of the Evangel that He accepts discredited professions, and is willing to trust again those whose failures have most deeply involved Him. Of no other love but His can it be truly said that it "surpasseth knowledge." That is to say, that knowing all there is to know of a man's weakness and defection, He still trusts him and believes in the possibility of a future brighter and better than the past has been ! This alone explains the further invitation He extends to the awakened and shamefaced band in the garden—"Rise, let us be going." Here is the confidence of a great love. They have failed Him only an hour ago, but He refuses to regard that hour as their best. So He opens up the opportunity which shall restore to them their lost self-respect, and win them to confident and close following, in almost the same terms as He had used when they rose from the supper and went toward the garden of His sorrow and their shame. "Rise, let us be going." It is as though He

said, "You have failed here, and the opportunity you have lost will never recur. But I offer you another one. Come with Me; not now to witness My struggle with the unseen foe, but to share My reproach amongst those who are openly working out his plans. I am going to danger and to death. But come with Me. I know you will not fail Me again."

It is just this confident love of His that saves them and us from utter despair, as we awaken from sin's sleep. He trusts us, therefore we must not fail Him. *Noblesse oblige!* Again, I venture to repeat that no one but Christ will put confidence in already disproven professions of love. No one but the Son of God will commit Himself to men who have so signally failed Him, as to offer them new opportunities of service—and failure. For I do not forget that these, His later expectations, were not fulfilled; nor indeed yet are they always realized. These men failed Him again, just as we do. But yet He still reposed enough confidence in them to commit to them the whole work

of His Kingdom. For after the supreme manifestation of love at the Cross and of power at the tomb, when their hearts were captured, subdued, and controlled as they never had been during the days of His flesh, He said to these very men who slept in the garden, "Go ye into all the world," as My representatives. Such is the love of Christ !

Does all this search and condemn our hearts, and at the same time uplift them into new desire and resolve ? Does the shame of our failure and the inexcusableness of our sleep overwhelm us ? Does the amazing confidence of Christ's love quicken in us the purpose of new and undivided allegiance and obedience to Him ? Then, leaving the dead past to bury its dead, but with its memory as a goad spurring us on in every languid hour, let us courageously arise and go with Him to do the next thing. Victory lies along that road which has no turning.

XI

THE EVANGEL OF THE SANCTUARY

"Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary."—PSA. xcvi: 6.

ONE of the commonest criticisms of the Christian life, as lived out before the world by the disciples of Christ, is that it has neither strength nor beauty. Its opponents affirm that its adherents have little if any grip upon their own lives; and that they exert little if any influence upon the course of common affairs. In short, that they are uninfluential, and hence negligible.

Nor is this judgment always the expression of malice or preconceived aversion to the Christian ideal. Too often the kind of Christian profession which men meet with, and by which they judge all that it stands

for, is very far from being either strong or beautiful. Marred by discrepancies, inconsistencies, and inconstancies, the lives of professing Christians are not infrequently in direct contradiction to those things they tacitly represent. Nor is it to be wondered at that those who see these things and sometimes indeed suffer by them, conclude that there is nothing either living or lovely about the religion which produces that type of life.

The collective force of this adverse judgment can only with difficulty be exaggerated. It forms one of the strongest influences opposed to the progress of the Kingdom of God. It is met at every turn by the worker for Christ, and is one of his severest antagonisms. It usually expresses a sort of unformulated respect for Christ Himself, with an undisguised contempt for His followers. Nor is it too much to say that the greatest task to which the Church of Christ must apply herself in this our day, is the removal of this reproach from her own name—and His. The reproach has

grown in consequence of the contradiction of individual lives ; and hence, only by the practical regeneration of individual lives can it be removed.

Now the answer of the Gospel, alike to the world's common criticism and to the lives which have evoked it, is foreshadowed in the Psalms, dimly apprehended in the Prophets, but fully revealed in Christ Himself. It is, that God plans to make men of His own type, sons of His own likeness. To this all His exhortations and demands bear witness. [He enjoins holiness, love, truth, the pure heart, upon all who call Him Father. But He also endues men who are strangers to these qualities with the grace for their acquisition. There is strength and beauty in the Sanctuary, for all. Any failure in these respects is, in fact, a failure to realize His plan and His promise. A deficient submission to His power, and ~~an inadequate~~ surrender to His control, are the frequent causes of this failure, which so involves His name in the world's unfavourable verdict,

It is, consequently, to these governing attitudes of the soul that all the influences of the Spirit are directed. Conscience is, up to a point, always God's ally. I mean that until it has been violated and its voice silenced by long disregard and disrespect, conscience always ranges itself on God's side in moral and spiritual issues. And God's side is always the side of our own truest interests. Thus it is that "strength and beauty" are vital to our peace of conscience. For if we are sincere at all in our professions of Christian discipleship, we have long since been convinced as to the kind of life we should live. It is seldom, indeed, that our ideals are at fault. Our greatest need is not for more light, for that would mean just more condemnation. We need most of all the translation of light into life, the conversion of facts of God into fruitfulness of life. In short, we need to discover the way into the Sanctuary as worshippers, and then the way out into the world as witnesses. Then only will conscience be void of offence "toward God and man."

Then only will the common reproach be rolled away from the name of Christ. For then the twin-graces of strength and beauty are seen in our lives.

Now to what does the Psalmist refer when he speaks of the "Sanctuary"? Not, surely, to any one place of God's worship, however hallowed by association and experience. His whole conception of God is too spacious and too spiritual to admit of anything so cramped and confining. To attempt to localize the presence of God and the transforming energies of intercourse with Him, to any place or ordinance, is a contradiction of His nature. Such expressions as, "Thy Courts," "Thy Pavilion," "The secret of Thy Presence," "Thy Sanctuary," may be taken to cover all those secret meeting-places of the soul with God, where in the fellowship which love—both His and ours—demands, all the resources of grace are put at our disposal, to meet the needs of which love increasingly makes us the more conscious. In that fellowship there is that which makes the weakest strong, and beauti-

fies the meek with salvation.] It is the secret of all spiritual dynamic. High up in those holy hills every stream of successful effort has its rise. In that bracing atmosphere moral anæmia is banished by the glowing tides of health. Strength and beauty are acquired by feeding upon the Strong and Beautiful.

— The Psalmist's frequent reference to the Sanctuary, is an interpretation of his own personal history. It is there he finds help in weakness, guidance in perplexity, and light in darkness. ~~The enabling cause of anything strong and beautiful in the life of the man after God's own heart is to be found there.~~ It will be ~~readily~~ recollected that he himself learned ~~all~~ this by ^{the various} ~~varying~~ experiences of life. Sometimes he is driven to the Sanctuary because his foes are pursuing him. He needs God as a refuge, and finds in Him then that sense of security and protection for which his fears cry out. Sometimes he is driven there by the conviction and condemnation of his own conscience. When his sin takes such hold upon him that he cannot

look up, he betakes himself to the Sanctuary; and there spreads out all his wrongdoing before the One Who understands him perfectly and judges him mercifully. Sometimes a sense of loneliness, with which we, too, are all familiar, makes him seek the Sanctuary of God for that sympathetic companionship for which his heart craves. Sometimes the weight of responsibility attaching to his office directs him there to seek help and inspiration from God.

And ^{so} ~~thus~~ it is variously with us. Anything which drives us into the Sanctuary is the minister of God to us—even our sense of failure in this very matter of strength and beauty. And as we come into His presence we find that our way lies round by a Fountain. There sin and all uncleanness may and must be lost, and for ever left. All that condemns and stains and mars our lives must be cleansed away as we draw near to the Sanctuary. It is only "by the Blood of Jesus" that sin-haunted and fear-crushed souls have "boldness to enter into the Holiest." But the sufficiency of the

Evangel is in the fact that His Blood atoneth and availeth for us all.

Now, to all those who know something of this, as the initial experience of the Christian life, there comes the snare of mistaking the dawn for the full noonday sunlight. We are prone to live as though that first experience of drawing near to God in Christ were a sufficient qualification for all life. We lose sight of the fact that we must dwell continually in the Sanctuary if we are to have such strength and beauty as is a worthy reflection of our Lord. There may be, and is, "life for a look"! But it takes more than a mere glance; it takes a long, unbroken gaze at the Saviour to transform a man into His likeness. To visit God but occasionally, having only periodical communion with Him, drawing near only as some special need impels, or some great crisis necessitates His help, is to make it absolutely certain that neither strength nor beauty will characterise life.

To correct and save us from this, God is always using means to teach us the need

and the art also of abiding in the Sanctuary. He is the Author of those compulsory withdrawals from the ordinary occupations of duty and pleasure which are often so inexplicable. I mean such things as sickness, pain, the frustration of hope, and the failure of enterprise which make us think and face out our position. He is the Author of the seeming calamity which draws us from the things which have drawn us from Him, in order to bring us into the true fellowship of His sons. He is the Author of that undefined, yet how real, dissatisfaction with the things for which we have spent labour and given life. He is the Author of the inner sense of incompleteness and heart-hunger which takes us to the shade of some fig-tree, there to weep, and ponder and stretch out our hands to an unrealised God. He is the Author of all this; to the intent that in the Sanctuary to which these things compel us, we may acquire inward life and outward loveliness which shall bring glory to His name in our testimony and witness before the world.

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~~Take~~ these two words, "strength and beauty," which are so vital to our peace of conscience and to our witness for Christ in the world, and look into their content. Simple as they are, and plain as is their surface-meaning, they hold depths of possible spiritual experience which, if realised in ever so slight degree, will prove a positive transformation indeed. I suppose there is not one of us who is not constantly experiencing the humbling discovery that self-strength has its very obvious limitations. It is true that we can do certain things of ourselves. But, oh ! how small they are ! And how soon do we come to the end of our own resources ! We find ourselves, for instance, set in the midst of opposing forces which we can by no means beat back, and over which we can never secure control. We realise how great is the life to which we are called and committed ; how high are its divinely-given ideals ; and how far-reaching its influences. Mere strength of human resolve might be sufficient were the foe less strong or the goal less high. If our

destiny were lower than it is, our difficulties would be less than they surely are. But since we must live as the sons of God, manifesting holiness, purity, truth, and all that we see in the Example-life ; since our destiny is eternal and not merely bounded by considerations of the present ; and since the life that now is is but part of the vaster, unending service into which we have been redeemed, we need the very power of God. Just because life is so great, and its possibilities so immeasurable, we must have the strength which is only to be found in the Sanctuary—or we shall surely fail.

Now, one of the first products of sin is strengthlessness. Most of the weakness in our lives to-day is very definitely related to our own sin. Take, for example, our weakness of desire. The difficulty with many of us is that we do not always even desire to be good, that our spiritual desires are uncertain, unequal, and fitful. And that languor of desire and purpose, and that half-heartedness also of moral effort which so effectively handicap us, are just the result

of sin. The same, too, is true with regard to weakness of purpose and resolve. For with every sinful indulgence there goes on a deterioration of mind and will, until ultimately it is not an exaggeration to say that all strength of resistance or accomplishment is lost. The wages of sin is more sin, and yet more. Until the man who continues to defy his conscience and to ignore the law of God becomes a mere strengthless slave.

How glorious is the Evangel of the Sanctuary which declares to such that God can repair the ravages of sin in conscience, mind, memory, and heart ; that He can recreate deteriorated capacities ; and that He can impart strength adequate to the task of making life in the future as unlike life in the past as it should be. How welcome is the Gospel which proclaims the purifying of all the inward impulses and inner springs of our lives. Strength and power are always according to purity ; and the wonder of this Word is that God can bring a clean and strong thing out of an unclean and strengthless. "Strength and beauty are in His

Sanctuary " for all who, realising their need, draw near in full assurance of faith.

It must be borne in mind, however, that there is here no promise of a " once for all " strength, an enduement which outlasts all the daily demands of life. Nor is there any thought of a gift which supersedes all personal effort. Sufficient strength is the constant impartation of God's own nature to those who constantly abide within the Sanctuary, re-enforcing all their own sincere and whole-hearted energies unto a fulfilment of His holy purposes. For there is no idea in this Evangel of any merely nerveless and languid spiritual life ; as though the strength which is in the Sanctuary made all but faith unnecessary. The Christian life is not an indolent rest, but an incessant resistance. The strength promised is a divinely-imparted energy working toward righteousness, holiness, and godliness. Its sign is a Cross. Its motto, to be bound to the heart of every weak, discouraged, and downcast believer, is that " My strength "—the strength which is always available to

those who dwell in the Sanctuary—"is made perfect in weakness."

Another of the obvious products of sin is moral ugliness. ~~All the moral and spiritual deformity of our lives is the consequence of transgression. Anything that mars the beauty of life can be traced back without difficulty or deviation to its first cause.~~ All the ugly habits and traits of character which so eloquently refute our Christian professions, all the tempers and dispositions, all the stains and inconsistencies, are the outcome of sin, which is, in its last analysis, just unregulated desire. And this ~~Evangel~~ of the Sanctuary declares that God can transform character, renew disposition, deal with the central cause of the ugliness, ~~smooth out the wrinkles, take away the spots,~~ and make us in an ever-increasing degree like unto Him ~~Whose name we bear.~~

There is an instinct for beauty in every one of us which is perfectly legitimate, though ~~it must be said that~~ its expression is not always worthy, nor our canons of judgment always reliable. For beauty in its essence is

spiritual. There is no beauty worth the name in which God has no part. Beauty is holy, as holiness is beautiful. It is the unholy things in life which at once deform us and defame Him. Ruskin has said that there are four things which destroy the beauty of any human face—sensuality, pride, ferocity and fear. And if this is true of mere physical appearance, ~~we know it to be~~ ^{is} still more so with regard to the soul. For these are the things which make the lives of professing Christians unlovely—~~sensual~~ ^{is} yieldings to the lower instincts; ~~proud~~ ¹⁷ enthronements of self-will; ~~fierce~~ ^{our} anger, ~~passion~~, jealousy and the like in ^{our} attitude toward others; and that consequent haunting fear which makes uncertain all relationship with the love of God and the God of love.]

✓ All God's ministry to us, His patient discipline of our lives, His correction of our ignorance and wilfulness, and the rich gifts of His Spirit are directed toward the removal of these ugly things, and toward the replacement of them by the beauty which all the

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world sees in Christ our Saviour and Pattern. "Strength in His Sanctuary?" How much we need it! "Beauty—in His Sanctuary?" How much we need it! And how truly we may have it! Can it be defined, this beauty of the Lord our God, which He seeks to put upon us? Never perfectly, for it defies definition as does the sunlight or the sweet melody of music. It is the harmony of humility without ostentation, of patience without indifference, of courage without self-assertiveness, of zeal without egotism, of faithfulness without intolerance, of love without dissimulation. And who can measure its attractive power upon the world when clearly seen in the lives of those who abide in the Sanctuary while still journeying in the street?

The other day, when travelling by rail from Victoria to Brighton, I noticed a little triangular patch of ground where some twenty or thirty sets of rail converge, which has been cultivated as a garden—I suppose by one of the railroad men. There, surrounded by these metals, along which the

great hurtling locomotives go by, hundreds of them every day, the roses were blooming and the nasturtiums and phloxes were lifting up their heads in gladness, despite all the destructive forces by which they were surrounded. Nothing could shut them out from the sunshine and dew and rain ; and so they grew in strength and beauty. As I passed they preached to me once again the Evangel of the Sanctuary. For they assured my heart that it is possible to dwell there, and so become strong and beautiful, despite every hostile influence of which life is so full.

But let it never be forgotten that this wonderful Gospel is only possible to us because of the unspeakable sacrifice of both strength and beauty in the person of our ~~Blessed~~ Lord. He was "crucified in weakness," though by His Word the worlds were created. He was crucified as One in Whom there was no beauty, though He is the Altogether Lovely One, and the Fairest among Ten Thousand. And because He relinquished and laid it down for us, we

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may draw near and receive that which shall make our lives what God desires and what the world expects them to be, both strong and beautiful. This is Salvation unto the uttermost. |

XII

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE UNOFFENDED

"Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me."—
MATT. xi. 6.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not
be offended."—JOHN xvi. 1.

ONE of the greatest perils of the Christian life lurks in the common pathway of discipleship. It is the peril of being offended in Christ. The fellowship to which the Gospel summons us inevitably inspires a constant new and humiliating discovery of self ; an unvarying disturbance of established order in our lives, as His will corrects and opposes our own ; and a ceaseless effort to attain to the ideal ; that is, to make our lives as followers, increasingly correspond to His as Forerunner. The danger is

just here—that we are apt to break down under the test and training of it all, to go back and walk no more with Him, in short to be offended in Him. It is always possible, despite every sincere profession of the soul, that what God meant for blessing should become blight to us by our misconceptions. It is always perilously possible that the light of to-day may become deep and impenetrable darkness to-morrow, by reason of our failure to obey and keep step with Him, by reason of our lagging behind or turning aside from the compelling guidances of Christ's companionship. Men have, in this way, unconsciously and imperceptibly put themselves far out of the range of Christ's saving influences; and have become, like the derelicts of the ocean, occasions of danger and disaster to countless other lives.

But Christ, with that absolute frankness which is a large part of His attractiveness to men, cannot be held to blame for such pitiful defections. For He never disguises the otherwise unthought-of possibility. In His

Evangel He combines welcome with warning as none other has ever done. His Word, while it opens the very heart of God to our consciousness, opens also our own hearts to us. By Him we come to know the Father, and by Him also we come to know ourselves. He reveals the entire faithfulness of God to us ; but He reveals also the instability of our own wills, and the untrustworthiness of our own emotions. He treats us not as ideal but as real men ; and forewarns us of the destruction that wasteth at noonday, as well as of the pestilence that walketh in darkness. Hence it is that to the most earnest and self-convinced of us all He says, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." The implicate is obvious and ominous. But the reality and richness of His grace is the sufficient and silencing answer to every one of our fears. The blessedness of the unoffended, despite all the danger without and the weakness within, is the possible acquisition of each one. And it is blessedness indeed.

Now it is necessary to remember the

meaning of the word "offend." In its original form it is the very word we frequently use—scandalise, and has the force of causing to stumble. So we may translate and expand this saying of Christ as being, "Blessed is he who does not find in Me any cause of stumbling ; who can keep his feet in My ways ; who is not tripped up by any obstacles in the path into which I have directed him." He uses the word quite frequently in this sense ; as, for instance, when He speaks of a man's hand or eye being a cause of stumbling to him, when He denounces those who cause little ones to be offended, and when He declares that in the day of His glory all things that offend shall be rooted out of His Kingdom.

But He never uses it so surprisingly as when He declares the possibility of men finding occasion of stumbling in Him. We are prepared to find it in the world, in the opposition of the devil, in the proven insincerity of others—but in Him ! This is surely the most startling of all His warnings. For in Him we have already found life and

salvation, guidance and peace, inspiration and satisfaction. And now to contemplate finding in Him also any cause of offence fairly staggers us. Or, had this word been applicable to men of the world, it would have occasioned little if any surprise. For instance, we are not greatly taken aback when those who knew Him so familiarly should treat Him so contemptuously and say, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" Nor are we entirely unprepared to find that the Pharisees were offended in Him when He spoke to them of the evil thoughts, adulteries, murders, and the like, which proceed from the hearts of men; for His words convicted them of sin. We are not much surprised that He should be a rock of offence to those who are avowedly disobedient to His demands. But that His own friends, those who really know Him, and who have been admitted into the intimacies of fellowship with Him, should find cause of offence in Him is passing strange. And its very mystery warns us to take heed to ourselves.

The setting of the first of these words gives us the key to their significance. John the Baptist was languishing in prison on the shores of the Dead Sea as the outcome of a life of the utmost faithfulness. He had been tremendously loyal to Christ, splendidly in earnest concerning his mission, wonderfully courageous in giving forth the message committed to him, and yet it had all ended in a dungeon. What a test for such a man ! It seemed as though his faith, his self-restriction, his willingness to decrease that Christ might increase, had all been unrecognised and unvalued. His experience so entirely contradicted God's assurance, that it is easy to understand the perplexity of mind which led him to send his disciples to Christ with the pathetic query, " Art Thou He that should come ? " For here is One Who has avowedly come to deliver captives, and yet He does not deliver the man who, more than all others, seemed to have claims upon Him. He has proclaimed His own mission in terms of sympathy and love for the

heartbroken, and yet here is a crushed and heartbroken man of whom He apparently takes no notice. Is it to be wondered at that at last uncertainty overcomes faith, so that he sends the messengers to Christ in the hope that He will declare Himself plainly, and interpret such utterly inexplicable and contradictory experience to the one who had at immense cost to himself maintained a devoted loyalty to the Son of God ? Christ's only answer to these messengers is an exhibition of His sovereign power over the forces of destruction and death ; with an injunction that they should tell John what they had seen, and give to him this message which calls for a new triumphant trust on his part, " Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." For it means that in the pathway of blessing the providence of testing will always be experienced. Its implication is that there is true peace only for that man who will trust Christ when he has no external aids to faith, who believes Him when he sees only the seeming denial of his confi-

dence, and who holds to his loyalty without stumbling when His treatment tests the endurance of His servant to the uttermost.

The second of these words of Christ helps us to understand how His message to John applies to ourselves—"These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended." Spoken as they were on the eve of His departure, when the fierce tests of discipleship were about to be experienced by His followers, they imply that they will need to stay their souls on the things He has told them concerning His purpose and power, if they are to avoid the peril of stumbling and going back to Him. For they are bound to come into experiences of test and strain as they carry out their consecration vows; and "in those days," says Christ, "be true to your own best experience of Me. Rest on that which no man can take from you—the personal knowledge you have of My grace. Hold to those things I have spoken and shown to you. Be loyal to Me. Trust Me entirely, despite every unexplained mystery and

seemingly unnecessary tribulation. Then you shall not be stumbled but strengthened by these very things which are all of My ordering."

Now it is not disloyal to Christ to say this, that He not only masters men but mystifies them also. While He blesses them He bewilders them too, so incomparably higher are His ways and thoughts than ours. He persuades us to love and loyalty. But He puzzles us too, often to the point of distraction. He certainly answers the questions of our hearts. But at the same time He arouses even more questions than He answers. And in the life of every true follower of Him, there will always be, as there was in His own, some great unanswered "Why?" None of us will ever be exempt from the need of acquiring by faith and patience the blessedness of the unoffended.

For think of an ordinary and typical instance of one who is offended in Him. It is not commonly a matter of open backsliding, of heartless renunciation of the

truth, or of bitter denial of past experience. Rather does it begin with the disappointment of some hope, the failure of an expectation, the weariness of an unanswered prayer, or the ache of a heart which seems to evoke no sympathetic answer from God. All this generates an unspoken and almost unspeakable distrust. As we brood over it, a sense of injustice grows. A feeling is gendered that we have not been treated quite fairly by Christ, which becomes in time a positive resentment. Until, after a little while, His yoke becomes irksome. We challenge His right to control our lives so. And it all ends in a secret repudiation of His mastership, and often in an outward renunciation also of all spiritual interests and aims. This is a typical cause of offence in Christ. And how many there are all around us of whose lives it is a true description! From small beginnings of distrust the largest disasters grow. The smallest distrust or disobedience is charged with the potentiality of the infinite. If it is undiscovered and unchecked, it will even-

tually put an eternity of distance between the soul and the Saviour. If, therefore, we can estimate some of the unchanging certainties of discipleship ; explore some, at least, of the perilous causes of offence in Christ ; and at the same time also establish a new relationship of implicit trust with our Lord, we shall be saved from this threatening peril. And this is surely the aim of His forewarning Word.

There is first of all the severity of His requirements. When we come to Christ at the beginning the pathway seems to be strewn with roses, and the air seems filled with sweet and soothing perfumes. For while Christ is absolutely frank with us, and veils nothing of the hardships and conflicts we must endure, our own powers of apprehension are so limited that we see but one thing at a time, and that one thing is that Christ meets all the need of which we are then immediately conscious. Hence we march to a glad strain with which our hearts are in tune. But before long we discover that the conditions of companion-

ship are severe. For instance, we find that a real separation from the world in spirit and purpose is entirely necessary to the maintenance of fellowship. We find that we cannot march to two tunes at once—and the world's strains are seductive indeed. We learn that we cannot keep step at the same time with Him and with popular opinion, with Him and the world, nor always with Him and the outward professing Church.

When this discovery is made, it often means that men are offended in Him. For His demand involves a costly disturbance in the regulation of home and business and social life, according to His order. It means possibly for some, the relinquishing of a kind of popularity which exists only because of shameful silence regarding Him. It involves others in the severance of ties which have become a large part of their life, and the sacrifice of material prosperities which partake of the nature of unrighteousness. It means for all of us the end of self-indulgence, a crucifixion in order to a coronation,

a dethronement in order to an enthronement. I say that when all this comes to be clearly apprehended, then it is that men are offended in Christ. When He says, "Cut off thy right hand! Pluck out thy right eye! Forsake all that you have! Take up the cross and follow Me!"—then comes the test which determines everything. Then too often men go back to walk no more with Him. Not because they do not understand Him, but because they have come to know Him too well! When He comes to be recognised, not only as the Christ of the sympathetic heart, but also as the Christ of the steadfastly set face, then great is the blessedness of the unoffended.

Then there is the mystery of His contradictions. It often seems as though Christ were unsympathetic with our best desires, with those aims which have originated in our fellowship with Himself. You want, for instance, to do some great service and to fill some great sphere. But Christ's answer to your longing is to

set you down to face the difficulties of a small work in a place where there is little, if any, recognition of your toil. You ask for spiritual service, and all that has been granted is a monotonous round of secular duty. And you are in danger of being offended in Him, just because there seems so little justification for His treatment of your high aim. Or, you have asked the gift of rest, and claimed His great promises on this head. But the answer has come in the necessity for stern and continuous conflict. The fires of temptation blaze around you, not less, but far more fiercely than ever; and you are both puzzled and provoked at such a fulfilment of the Word upon which you have hoped. Or, you have desired to have a life less burdened and strained. His only response, however, has been to impose other and heavier burdens upon you. And you are well-nigh offended in Him. The mystery of it all baffles every serious purpose, and the temptation to distrust is at times almost too much.

Now it will help us if we remember the simple fact, that He knows and does just what is best both for the development and repression of our lives. In reality, He is only unsympathetic with our egotisms. He only seeks to destroy within us anything savouring of self-love, self-pride, and self-sufficiency. He works to reproduce in us something of the beauty of His own character. In His contradictions rightly apprehended we may always see the expression of His perfect wisdom with regard to our own highest interests, and the interests also of the Kingdom in which He has given us a share. Then "blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended"; who accepts the direction of Christ as His love; and who trusts Him, "when to simply trust Him seems the hardest thing of all."

Beyond these causes is yet another in the slowness of His methods. We come to Him and put our lives under His control, expectant of immediate realization of a deliverance which shall lift us beyond all concern regarding temptation and opposing

forces. But how disappointingly slow is this realization. How hardly won are our victories even when we are re-enforced by His Spirit. Quite early we find that life is not a song, but rather a strife ; that the grace of Christ is not a mere ecstasy but rather an energy which works painfully for righteousness in us. We soon learn that it takes all the watchfulness of which we are capable to occupy the ground already conquered, as well as to conquer fresh territory. And the slowness of Christ in this matter of our own spiritual conflicts is often the cause of offence to us. For it disappoints our hopes, and contradicts our misconceptions as to anything like a passive and easy victory over our strong enmities. In reality, however, this method, slow though it may seem to us, is the only one He could possibly pursue, having in view the greatness of His purpose and the contrariety of our nature. And every experience of victory, however small and insignificant, is prophetic of an ultimately complete triumph.

If you go into the Observatory at Greenwich you will see there a delicate instrument, by means of which the astronomers measure the distances of the stars, as well as their magnitude. Upon a sensitive mirror is reflected the light of the star points ; and a measurement of the angles at which any two of the rays meet, furnishes sufficient data for all the astounding calculations of millions of miles. So it is in our lives. By estimating what Christ has already done we are assured of His unvarying purpose. Every bit of experience of His power to sanctify, to cleanse, to redeem, to deliver, is prophetic of the whole—"that He Who hath begun the good work will perfect it." If we but cling to this fact, we shall find it an inspiration to the steady continuance of faith, and shall not be offended because He works so slowly—and surely.

The same is true also in regard to the progress of the Kingdom, whose interests we are called to serve. How often we find in the slowness with which spiritual results are

achieved a cause of offence in Christ. We begin by expecting that when we lift up Christ we shall immediately see crowds flocking to Him. We imagine that we have but to work faithfully in the service of God and man, and results are certain to be apparent. But how different is the realisation! How hardly souls are wooed and won! How true it is that tares grow up with the wheat! How certain that he who goes forth bearing precious seed must needs weep as he goes!

The difficulty of believing God is on the field when He is most invisible, is often too much for many who commence to work for Him with high hopes and valiant beliefs which seem all unjustified. Like the disciples, they think that "the Kingdom of God should immediately appear"; and in the discipline of their enthusiasm, and the conversion of their consecration into continuance, they are apt to be "offended." Now it would not be difficult to bring instance upon instance to prove that, in spiritual work, when results are least

visible they are often most real. The worker who will go on without the stimulus of outward success, who will continue His witness even when he is met by cold indifference, who will carry out Christ's work in the unfailing inspiration of knowing that it is His work, is the one who gets the blessedness of the unoffended. And part of it is in the certain harvest of all his sowing, and the sure reward of all his service.

But perhaps over and above these suggested causes of offence in Christ is the unreasonableness of His silences. I have every sympathy with John the Baptist in his perplexity—"If this is really the Christ, why does He not act as Christ? Why does He do nothing to deliver His captive herald, or to bring peace to his troubled heart?" One visit from Christ would have changed his prison to a palace. One hand-clasp from Him would have transmuted his gloom into glory. But He did not give it. Just so was it also at Bethany, when He left Martha and Mary to their sorrow for two long and weary days. I

sympathise with them in their utter inability to understand His delay in the light of His love. I well understand the implied protest of the word with which they at length greeted Him, "If Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." His silence seemed so entirely unreasonable. And still does it seem unreasonable when He apparently pays no heed to our prayers, and we cry as to a brazen heaven. Who does not know this bitter experience and the subtle temptation lurking there? You have prayed for the conversion of loved ones, but they are apparently to-day as unyielding and impenitent as ever. You have prayed for temporal things which seemed entirely necessary, and no answer has come. You have sought relief from some pressing burden, but no lightening of the load has been given; and to-day it is heavier than ever. Under these circumstances the thought that Christ's silence is unreasonable is never very far away. Loyalty to Him is strained sorely, almost to breaking-point. It is almost excusable to

be "offended" in Him. But as with John in prison, and the sisters at Bethany, and hosts of others in all ages, He is not unmindful, however His silence may seem to point to it. He is training them, and us, to undaunted faith; to live in the realm of the unseen and eternal; to walk in His own steps. Sometimes what we call unanswered prayer, proves beyond question a greater blessing than the desired answer could possibly have been. When Christ responds to our requests in the negative, we may be certain that the positive would have been for our undoing. He withholds secondary mercies to teach us the importance and value of the primary. His denials are our enrichments, not our impoverishments. For His purposes are vastly bigger than our prayers; and while His speech may be as silver, His silence is as gold. "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me."

"These things have I spoken unto you; that, despite the severity of My requirements, the mystery of My contradictions,

the slowness of My methods, the unreasonableness of My silences, ye should not be offended." What things were these ? What will secure His people against the peril of defection ? What are the permanent securities of our faith ? In a word, the sureness of His way before us—"I came from the Father," "I go unto the Father," "I am the way." Then the certainty of His love toward us—"The Father Himself loveth you." And the constancy of His union with us—"Ye in Me and I in you." These are the germ-truths of all His forewarnings. And their expansion is in the lives of His people. Blessed is he who, resting upon these facts of God, makes them the factors of his own life ; and goes on unoffending and unoffended, always radiant with "the peace that passeth all understanding," and increasingly becoming part of the world's illumination as he reflects his Lord.

But let us beware of putting any undue value upon our mere perception of this truth. Let us beware of over-estimating

the strength of our own resolves and resources. Let us beware of saying anything like, "Though all men should be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." Rather, in a sensitive, humble dependence on Christ, which always expresses itself in rigid devotion and loyalty to His Word, let us seek to live as men of manifested faith. For this is the condition which governs all the blessedness of the unoffended.

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